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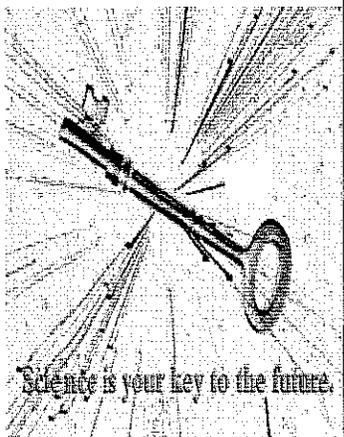
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New Haven Public Schools

TO: Rep. Dianne Urban

Sen. Dante Bartolomeo

Cc: Clerk, Committee on Children: Elizabeth Giannaros

FROM: Richard Therrien

DATE: February 21, 2013

RE: Raised House Bill HB632

I apologize for not being available to testify in person (we have school this week). I would like to offer concerns about the current language of rHB 632, *An Act concerning Dissection Choice*. This bill has been offered in various forms since 2009 in both the Education and the Children Committees. In 2009 the bill included language about “*experiments*”. In 2010 it specified that student opt out was by “*written conscientious objection*” by “*parent or guardian*”. In 2011, it was just by “*conscientious objection*”.

In 2012 and now in 2013, the bill specifies “*A local or regional school district shall excuse any student from participating in, or observing, the dissection of any animal as part of classroom instruction if such student has requested, in writing, to be excused from such participation or observation*”, adding in “*observing*” and removing “*conscientious*”.

It appears as if the purpose of the bill is to disallow forced participation in dissection activities in required courses, such as Biology, when there is a clear premeditated conscientious objection, without penalizing the student, a concept I, and fellow science educators, strongly support. However the current bill, as written, does not take into account all situations.

The definition of “*dissection*” is unclear. Examining owl pellets, chicken wings, or even earthworms are common middle school science activities. The new concept of disallowing “*observing*” for a student in the classroom is also unclear, and would be difficult to implement, especially if objection is not given with significant prior notice.

There is also an issue of advanced elective high school courses in which dissection is an understood preset important part of curriculum, such as our AP Anatomy and Physiology courses and others at Hill Career Medical High School that work with Yale New Haven Hospital in many ways. We also have aquaculture courses at Sound School that students raise, harvest and examine fish. If the extreme case of disallowing even “*observation*” the actual day of a lab in any class simply by a short written note handed to the teacher is required by this law it would be quite disruptive to classroom instruction.

I suggest removing the concept of “*observation*”, and including back in the concept of “*conscientious objection*” with “*sufficient prior or timely*” written notice. However, I continue to strongly recommend that each district be allowed and required to decide the details appropriate for each course and school, including appropriate alternatives.

It is clear that each Board of Educations should adopt policies around dissection choice that also allow for its instructional worth. In 26 years of science education, I have seen the value of dissection and working with vertebrate animals as a way to encourage students in science. While we do



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not require dissection in New Haven Schools in required high school Biology, what I have observed is the power of the activity. Rather than students being desensitized to animals, it actually makes them realize how delicate and precious living organisms are. The experience of working with soft, fragile organs and tissues makes it much more real to them than hard plastic models, drawings and computer animations. For students who often are surrounded by all types of violence and casual regard to life, I appreciate the value of the activity. It helps them realize what makes up humans and animals, and helps them gain sensitivity to the tenuousness of all life.

When New Haven Public Schools testified on HB No. 6565, AAC Humane Education, on March 9, 2009, we were offered the opportunity to submit substitute language for Section 3 of the bill. Science educators and organizations such as CT Science Teachers, CT Science Supervisors, and CT Academy were consulted. Several states have specific language, as does National Biology Teachers that may be useful to the Committee. (See: <http://www.nabt.org/websites/institution/index.php?p=97> for references to specific language from other states.)

The substitute language was much longer than the current language, but, given the many types of science taught in grades pre-K-12, many of the issues may be appropriate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Richard Therrien

Proposed substitute language:

(a) Each local and regional board of education shall adopt a policy regarding dissection, which may only be performed on specimens secured from a recognized source of such specimens and under supervision of qualified instructors.

(b) Each local and regional board of education shall adopt a policy allowing for opt out by students of dissection activities in required courses. Such a policy shall include procedures: (1) for prior notification of students and parents about dissection activities; (2) for required alternative dissection activities, including but not limited to: computer/web based virtual dissections, models and simulations; (3) by which students who have moral, religious, or philosophical objections to dissection activities may opt out of such activities with sufficient prior written notice; and (4) for grading policies that will not negatively impact such students.

(c) The provisions of this section shall not be construed to prohibit or constrain conventional instruction in the normal practices of animal husbandry or exhibition of any livestock in connection with any elective agricultural or aquacultural program or instruction of advanced students participating in elective advanced research, scientific studies, or projects, provided details of such instruction and use of animals are clear prior to course selection.

