

Testimony

H.B. 5559 An Act Concerning A Uniform School Calendar

Submitted by: Eileen S. Howley, Ed.D.,

Executive Director of LEARN

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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishman, and members of the Education Committee

My name is Eileen Howley and I serve as the Executive Director of LEARN, the regional educational service center serving our twenty four member school districts, their staff, students, and families, in southeastern Connecticut and along the Connecticut shoreline. This testimony is in support of Raised Bill 5559, An Act Concerning a Uniform School Calendar, as well as to support all of the recommendations of the Uniform Regional School Calendar Task Force.

LEARN has a history of a *voluntary* regional school calendar and LEARN members presented those experiences to the Task Force. Our local area superintendents come together regularly to draft and ultimately adopt a regional calendar. Superintendents then use the regional calendar as *the blueprint* for working with their local boards of education and adopt it or adapt it based on local needs, customs, traditions as well as contractual demands.

HB 5559 supports the Task Force recommendation of delaying the mandated year of implementation to allow school districts more time to modify binding contractual language and avoid unnecessary impact bargaining costs. I urge the committee to support the delay in the mandated compliance and to consider all of the Task Force recommendations. The Task Force representatives included members of the legislature, State Board of Education, Connecticut Federation of Teachers, Connecticut Education Association, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents, a school principal, the president of the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association and the general manager from First Student Transportation. This committee all recognized the potential benefits of a common calendar and the potential opportunities. These benefits include shared services, personnel and professional development as well as coordinated transportation contracts, for example. However, there are many unique characteristics in particular communities, such as time honored holidays, customs and traditions, as well as variances in local contracts. The Task Force considered the variations across communities and therefore, made recommendations that both support achieving regional efficiencies while still allowing for some variance based on contractual and local needs.

Specifically, in addition to delaying mandated adoption of the calendar, the Task Force recommends the addition of up to five days within a regional calendar for cultural and religious observances, based on community needs, and unanticipated circumstances such as construction delays, serious maintenance issues, and student assessment windows. (Every community is not the same, and even weather events that vary across our region create variances in our calendars). In addition, requiring that the state vocational-technical system schools adhere to the regional calendars, as well as other public schools of choice, would be essential to help achieve regional efficiencies.

We know that Connecticut is the land of steady habits. In the LEARN region, through these *voluntary* efforts, we have been able to achieve positive results. Our superintendents saw the need and the benefits of establishing a blueprint together and worked together over time to achieve this regional effort. While not every district accepts every aspect of the calendar, the regional start dates, regional days for professional development, and generally similar vacation periods have all promoted shared learning, shared transportation costs and shared efficiencies, while still maintaining local control of the final calendars and supporting local communities.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of the bill and hope that you will consider the recommended flexibilities to support its successful implementation.