

Testimony of Tom Swan, Executive Director, CT Citizen Action Group (CAG)

March 12, 2014

Before the Education Committee

In opposition to SB 425

Good Afternoon, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman and other members of the Education Committee; my name is Tom Swan and I am testifying on behalf of over 20,000 member families of CCAG: CT Citizen Action Group. I want to thank you for having the hearing today urge your rejection of SB 425 AAC the State Education Resource Center.

In 2012 I filed a whistle blower complaint with the State Auditors surrounding the Education Commissioner's utilization of the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to circumvent procurement policies for the state and to reward his friends and colleagues. The Auditors found that the State Department of Education failed to comply with state contracting laws, policies and procedures regarding the awarding of contracts to Leeds Global Partners, LLC, and Education Frist, LLC and that Commissioner Pryor misstated the tax status of SERC. These findings were confirmed in a letter from the Attorney General in January of this year.

In their report on SERC, the Auditors outlined three options for SERC going forward. Unfortunately this bill represents the option with the least amount of accountability and the greatest potential for abuse. The Auditors stated that 90% SERC's budget came from state resources. It is our belief that these funds are public dollars and should be treated just like funds going to any other agency in terms of transparency, procurement, and accountability.

Connecticut's history of corrupt behavior at quasi-public entities, combined with the State Department of Education's track record of abuse of SERC is a disaster waiting to happen. Connecticut taxpayers, education professionals, and students deserve better. It is for these reasons we urge you to reject SB 425 and clarify that SERC is an office within the State Department of Education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.