

***Testimony of Marianne Kirner, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, State Education Resource Center  
Before the Education Committee  
Regarding Raised Bill No. 425: "An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center"  
March 12, 2014***

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Bye, Representative McCrory, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Marianne Kirner, and I am the Executive Director of the State Education Resource Center (SERC).

I am here today to express my support and the support of my colleagues at SERC for Raised Bill Number 425, "An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center."

This bill not only allows us to continue a 45-year collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), it also positions us to further SERC's work on behalf of children and families. Our collaboration with the CSDE has served our stakeholders well. Last year, over a quarter million educators, service providers, families, and community members benefitted from SERC's professional development, technical assistance, library resources, and website.

SERC provides professional development in every critical area in education, including special education, culturally relevant pedagogy and discipline, early childhood, and school-family-community partnerships. We have steadfastly advanced the interests of students with disabilities since the establishment of the Special Education Resource Center in 1969. The case of P.J. v. State of Connecticut provides an example of how SERC has made a difference. In 2002, the U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut, approved a settlement agreement regarding high-quality inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities. SERC was part of a comprehensive system of training and technical assistance to ensure progress toward the settlement agreement's goals. At the conclusion of the case in 2012, the presiding judge commended SERC, noting that: "The efforts made by SERC were designed to extend and improve regular class placements, and the data demonstrate that those efforts were effective" (2:91-CV-180 (RNC), p. 54).

SERC has also made an impact by assisting families and schools to identify practices that facilitate partnerships. As you know, student success depends heavily on family engagement in education. The Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC) at SERC provides professional learning opportunities for educators on strategies for collaborating with families, including how to promote literacy and reading in the early grades. It also provides information and support to families on educational systems and structures. CT PIRC was initially established through a federal grant and is now sustained primarily through fee-for-service.

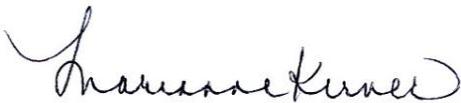
The demand for SERC expertise with English Language Learners and students of color is skyrocketing, including at the preschool level. The teachers we serve consistently praise SERC's ability to prepare them to work cross-culturally with both families and children. As one teacher said during an interview with the New Britain Herald, "The training taught me how to be more open-minded. There were not as many ethnic groups when I grew up in Newington. It's important to be able to relate with different cultures."

**We support Raised Bill 425, particularly the following points:**

- **The bill will provide the necessary clarity about SERC's legal status.** We welcome this step, as it will strengthen SERC's long-term viability and enable us to carry out the unique mission that the General Assembly and the CSDE have supported for decades. As a quasi-public agency, SERC will have its own Federal Identification Number (FIN) for use in securing private funds and federal grants. We recently submitted a federal grant application that was scored very highly, and yet an award could not be made due to the fact that SERC had to use our fiscal agent's FIN.
- **The bill will establish a governance board.** We welcome the voices that will become a part of SERC's efforts to achieve its mission and vision of equity and excellence in education. We believe in the value of diverse perspectives and expertise. These can work only to strengthen our programs and services. We look forward to partnering with board members who share our particular passion for the education of students with disabilities, students of color, English Language Learners, and families.
- **The bill maintains the Special Education Resource Center at SERC with federal funds granted to the state,** enabling SERC to deliver services seamlessly through the transition period. The bill also continues support for the establishment of **the Connecticut School Reform Resource Center.** We are especially excited to invigorate this center in close collaboration with the new board members and the CSDE.

Having led SERC for over 25 years, I can assure you that our agency is strong and viable. With your continued support, SERC will continue to fulfill its mission to provide high-quality programs and activities with transparency and in collaboration with policy makers, state agencies, educators, families, and community partners.

Thank you.



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Marianne Kirner, Ph.D., Executive Director