

**Testimony  
Submitted to the  
Education Committee  
March 17, 2014**

**S.B. No. 473 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOLS**

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Dr. Bruce Douglas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). CREC provides extensive educational support and professional development services throughout the state of Connecticut, manages five highly accomplished and specialized programs for students with disabilities, and operates 19 successful interdistrict magnet schools in the greater Hartford area.

I am testifying today on **Senate Bill 473**, An Act Concerning Magnet Schools.

As you know, our state is facing a funding dilemma surrounding school district tuitions for Sheff magnet schools. A series of patchwork decisions around the Sheff vs. O'Neill Settlement Agreement has led to a funding approach that disproportionately and severely burdens a small number of Connecticut's school districts.

Under court-order, 22 districts are required to comply to assist the state in meeting the goals of the Sheff Settlement Agreement.<sup>1</sup> At a collective cost of more than \$22 million, this has had a significant and debilitating financial impact on those 22 school districts and their municipalities. Numerous school districts not named in the Sheff decree, but which participate in order to meet the Sheff benchmarks, also suffer a financial burden on behalf of the state. Adequately funding these programs in order to meet the benchmarks of the Sheff Settlement Agreement is the state's obligation.

Moreover, proposed legislation will require families of students attending early childhood programs in Sheff magnet schools to pay tuition. This will threaten the ability of Sheff magnet schools to maintain racial balance in programs that are essential for our state to meet the Sheff benchmarks. Neither of these funding structures is just or sustainable. The most viable, long-term, and fair solution is for the state to modify the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula to account for students attending magnet schools when calculating each school district's ECS grant.

Currently, each town's grant under ECS is determined by applying multiple calculations to Connecticut's per pupil "foundation" amount. Except for the foundation grant, which is currently set by state law, the basic formula incorporates various sub-formulas, each of which is calculated using district-specific factors, such as town wealth, the number of "need students," and identification as an Alliance District. We recommend that compliance under the Sheff Settlement Agreement be

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<sup>1</sup> The Sheff Stipulation and Proposed Order, dated April 4, 2008 reads: "Sheff Region: As defined in the original complaint, the Sheff Region includes the school districts of Avon, Bloomfield, Canton, East Granby, East Hartford, East Windsor, Ellington, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Hartford, Manchester, Newington Rocky Hill, Simsbury, South Windsor, Suffield, Vernon, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks. The Desegregation Standard shall be the lesser of the Sheff Region's aggregate minority percentage enrollment plus thirty percentage points or seventy-five percent {75%}. The Desegregation Standard shall be calculated for each year of the Stipulation based on that year's aggregate minority percentage enrollment figures but in no event shall it exceed seventy-five percent {75%}."

one of the factors that determine a school district's ECS grant amount. This change would acknowledge a school district's court-ordered responsibility to participate in Sheff programs by increasing their grant amount, thus reducing the disproportionate burden that these districts face on behalf of the state. Furthermore, any school district not required to comply under the Sheff court-order, which contributes to meeting the benchmarks of the Sheff Settlement Agreement, should be given the same consideration.

Meeting the state's obligations under the Sheff Settlement Agreement is a priority for our legislature and for our school districts. Modifying the Educational Cost Sharing grant to account for Sheff compliance is a just, long-term means of addressing this challenge.