

**TESTIMONY OF  
THE EAST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL  
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
MARCH 17, 2013**

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 473, An Act Concerning Magnet Schools and urge the committee to consider an amendment to limit the local board of education's financial obligation for magnet school tuition to the tuition for no more than 5% of the student population.

We appreciate the dedication of this committee and Governor Malloy to properly funding educational opportunities in Connecticut. However, some of these initiatives have had unintended effects on the very students they are designed to help.

Under *Sheff v. O'Neill*, the state provided additional funding for magnet schools designed to attract a diverse student population from throughout the Greater Hartford region. These magnet schools – funded at a rate higher than other public schools – have succeeded to attracting students from the Hartford suburbs. The problem is that some of these schools charge the sending school district tuition – creating an additional revenue stream to the state funding for such schools.

The financial impact of magnet school tuition has grown significantly for East Hartford Public Schools to \$2.3 million for the current fiscal year.

This is of concern to the East Hartford Town Council as we struggle to maintain quality police, fire, medical response, trash and recycling, youth and senior programs and services while depending on a grand list limited by the lack of significant additional developable acres and with a sizeable affordable housing base of starter homes resulting in a population with household income lower than the state average.

The Town Council has taken many steps to keep our financial house strong: using 10 year payback bonds, limited lease-purchases to a level annual budget, funding the pension at the actuarial recommended amount, maintaining a solid fund balance. We have reduced non-public safety positions by 25% since 1990, or 77 positions and have taken other measures to limit costs.

Despite these limited financial resources, the Town Council has worked with the Board of Education and the mayor on combining services and has appropriated almost \$5 million in additional educational aid over the past 4 years during which ECS funding has been frozen. However, we simply do not have extra funds to assist the board of education's operational increases that are further strained by magnet school tuition.

From our perspective, the state educational policy needs to be changed. Here is what we face in East Hartford:

- The state recognizes that additional funds for specialized services are necessary to address student achievement gaps (many East Hartford students do very well, but there are a number of students who come to school with emotional problems, learning disabilities or lack of preparation for which the school must provide additional services for these students to achieve their potential);
- To that end, the state has provided millions of dollars in restricted Alliance funding directly to the East Hartford Public Schools while freezing any annual increase in state Educational Cost Sharing funding that could go to on-going services and costs like magnet school tuition
- The state established and funded the growth of magnet schools, allowing the schools to charge sending school districts tuition resulting in a school district such as East Hartford having to find an additional \$2.3 million in its budget – any increase of which would have to come from local funds as ECS funding is frozen. And this amount is in addition to other increases in normal school expenses such as teacher salaries, health insurance, textbooks.
- At the same time, the state has recognized in its ECS criteria that the town of East Hartford has limited ability to pay for school services because of its demographics and grand list limitations.

A cap of 5% on magnet school tuition would provide interim relief to financially strapped towns like East Hartford. Further adjustments may need to be made to ensure that public schools receive fair state funding for critical services.

Thank you for your consideration.