

*Connecticut General Assembly  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Education  
Public Hearing  
March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015*

Thank you for the opportunity to offer you my testimony today.

My name is Christine Cabral. I am here on behalf of LEARN magnet schools in southeastern Connecticut. I have four children, ages 11, 9, 8, and 5. Three currently attend the Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London. I have been actively involved as a parent volunteer there for 8 years. I am a small business owner and I live in Groton.

I'm asking you to please increase the transportation grant maximum and to create a funding formula for non-Sheff magnet school.

My family's experience at our magnet school has been wonderful. There is a school culture of dignity and respect, multiculturalism, and lifelong learning. My children have been given a high quality, robust education. Perhaps my best evidence of the great job the school is doing is my 11 year old daughter who is now in middle school. She's an academically advanced, compassionate, respectful leader. I have been told on multiple occasions "We can tell which kids went to the Regional Multicultural Magnet School. It shows."

I have one main purpose here today. To tell you that the \$1300 per pupil maximum reimbursement set forth by the Interdistrict Magnet School Transportation grant (Sec. 10-264i) for non-Sheff schools is not adequate in southeastern Connecticut.

Every year magnet school parents in our area wait for budget season to see which districts might cut transportation. The problem is, the grant is not sufficient to cover the costs of today.

It has not been increased since 2006 – 8 years ago.

In 2010 Sheff schools had an increase from \$1400 to \$2000 per pupil. Non-Sheff schools are receiving \$700 less than Sheff region sending districts. It is not less expensive to transport students in southeastern Connecticut vs. the Sheff region.

Two years ago my transportation was cut. I found out by reading it in the newspaper at budget time. What did the bus cut mean? It meant that for my family, and 96 others, no bus was coming to take our kids to school in September. In a nutshell, it meant that in our urban area of mixed socio-economic backgrounds, with extreme diversity from employers like Pfizer and Electric Boat, and highly mobile military families tied to the Coast Guard and the Subbase, the opportunity for school choice and a magnet school education was being eliminated.

I, along with a group of parent advocates spent weeks researching the grant, reviewing financial statements, attending every town council and school board meeting. We presented at our budget hearing. Thankfully, we were successful and it was reinstated for us. Others in southeastern Connecticut are not so lucky.

Last year, buses were threatened in at least 3 districts and one district lost their buses completely. For some, the hardship of transportation loss is too great to overcome and they must withdraw. The students affected by this are settled and successful; benefitting from the multicultural theme of the school, some with learning plans in place. This is the real impact of what underfunding is doing to families.

Non-Sheff schools are also in desperate need of a funding formula. The last increase to overall funding was over 4 years ago. Flat funding a school is really like a cut.

We can't change the past but we can address this inequity now. I'm asking you to please increase the transportation grant maximum and to create a funding formula for non-Sheff magnet school. Thank you for your time.