

## Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners



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### **TESTIMONY CONCERNING HOUSE BILL NO. 6835, AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.**

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee; good day and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill No. 6835, An Act Concerning English Language Learners.

My name is Chalise Ross and I am here representing the Bilingual Education sub-committee of the Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners (CAPELL). The members of CAPELL are dedicated to improving the educational experience of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the state. Our membership represents districts across the state with programs for ELLs.

Programs for ELLs in our state aim to develop students' English language proficiency so that they can be successful in the English speaking classroom. The Connecticut Core Standards require complex academic language use in all subject areas even at the earliest grades; yet research on second language acquisition shows that it can take 5-7 years for a student to achieve a level of English proficiency necessary for academic success. Now, more than ever, our services are of the utmost importance to support and educate identified ELLs. We fully support increasing the number of months a student is eligible for bilingual programs from 30 to up to 60 months.

It is necessary to clarify for the committee that a bilingual education program is not the only type of program available to assist ELLs. Schools are required to identify ELLs and provide English language services if the student is not proficient in grade level academics in English.

Across the state, ELL programs vary, depending on the population and need in each district. These programs are most often referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These programs provide instruction and support in English language development. Instruction is in English. We have heard proponents of SB 6835 say that schools with fewer than 20 students do not provide support to ELLs. That is not true. The 20-student threshold is applied only to a mandated bilingual education program. ESL or ESOL services are required for all identified students per Title III, regardless of the number of students or their language.

A Bilingual Education Program is a very effective means to provide core content instruction in a student's native language as the student is learning English. Research also tells us that content skills learned in the first language can be transferred to classwork in English when the student becomes more proficient in English. For example, once a student learns how to identify the main idea and details of a text in their native language, they will be able

to apply this skill when reading in English. We support these programs, and the expansion of them to allow more time to students who need it.

While we fully support Bilingual Education Programs, we are concerned about the staffing implications in the bill as it has been proposed. The proposed bill would mandate that a school provide a Bilingual Education Program if there are 6 or more ELLs who speak the same language in one school building. There is currently a teacher shortage in the area of bilingual education. Lowering the threshold would mandate many more schools to provide bilingual education programs in many languages, as I am sure you will hear from representatives at various districts. Finding highly qualified teachers with bilingual education certification will be even more difficult, and in some cases, with some languages, nearly impossible.

At the LPRAC Forum on Bilingual Education on January 13, 2015, Ann Anderberg spoke about the "Silos of Action" we have surrounding our public schools. Instead of working as independent silos to improve the education of our students, we need to combine our resources and efforts. We encourage you to look at the different departments, task forces, organizations, and create ways for us to work together towards the same goal. Through these types of enhancements, we can ensure improved programs for ELLs in our schools.

We all agree that ELLs need more support, and we urge you to look at enhancing the provisions that are already in place, rather than mandate new ones. We recommend that you take action in order to ensure that all ELLs are enrolled in high quality programs by:

- Requiring teacher preparation and certification programs to include at least 6 credits on issues dealing with second language acquisition, as well as local and federal laws, regulations, and implications for teaching ELLs in order to give new teachers the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of ELLs in their classrooms.
- Increasing professional development that focuses on strategies that are proven effective with ELLs and that will help every student in the general education class, but which are essential for ELLs.
- Providing professional development for all administrators on the unique linguistic and academic needs of ELLs to ensure that quality programs are being implemented in schools.
- Mandating certification flexibility and incentives that will help increase the pool of certified bilingual education teachers is needed now, and will be even more important if the eligibility timeframe is increased.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you in making sure that all students and especially English Language Learners are provided with high quality programs, who are taught by highly qualified teachers and administrators and who understand how to best address the linguistic, cultural, academic, and social needs of this ever increasing student population.