

## Center for Children's Advocacy

### TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6835, AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal organization affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy.

The Center for Children's Advocacy **supports** Raised Bill No. 6835, which requires school districts to provide a program of bilingual education when there are six or more eligible students enrolled in a public school and increases the time a student may spend in a program of bilingual education from thirty months to sixty months among other important outcomes.

The Center particularly supports **two** important measures advanced by this bill:

#### **I. ENSURING ACCESS OF MINORITY STUDENTS TO A BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

By requiring a board of education which determines that six or more students in a public school under the jurisdiction of such board of education is classified as dominant in any language other than English to provide a program of bilingual education for each such eligible student, this bill greatly increases access to the education curriculum for very vulnerable student populations. This is in the spirit of current federal legislation and consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* ruling and subsequent federal civil rights case law (e.g., *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981).

One of the tenets of the standards-based reform movement is that all children, including English language learners (ELLs), are expected to attain high standards. The rationale for including these students in high-stakes tests is to hold them to the same high standards as their peers and to ensure that their needs are not overlooked.<sup>1</sup> A November 2014 report from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium expects that the vast majority of ELL's in most cases rates as high as 92% are expected to fail the Common Core SBAC Test.<sup>2</sup> This is simply unacceptable and increasing access to a bilingual education for these students can bridge this achievement gap.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard et. al. (2007) *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education Second Edition*, Center for Applied Linguistics, at 8.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Disaggregated-FieldTestDataFINAL.pdf>

**II. INCREASING THE TIME A STUDENT MAY SPEND IN A PROGRAM OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION FROM THIRTY TO SIXTY MONTHS.**

Similarly, many students exit from bi-lingual education programs without regard to their level of mastery of the English language. This is counter intuitive and detrimental to their ability to achieve. Extending the length of bilingual education to sixty months ensures that exit from a bilingual program is done when the student has attained a higher level of mastery therefore allowing the student to access the curriculum.

**We hope that you are compelled to pass Raised Bill No. 6835. By passing this bill you will help address education disparities in our State and bridge the achievement gap for a very vulnerable student population.**

Respectfully submitted,  
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Staff Attorney