

February 24, 2015

To: Education Committee

From: Rafeed Hussain  
East Lyme, CT

Re: Education Issues  
Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program  
S.B. No. 942, Section 16, Subsection (a)

Hi, My name is Rafeed Hussain, and I am addressing Senate Bill No. 942. I've participated in Project Oceanology's Ocean Camp, Ocean Diversity Institute and the After School Marine Science Program; all of these programs were IDCG funded.

I spent my first day at Project Oceanology as an ocean camper way back in the 7th grade... I didn't want to be there; my mom made me go. "It's free, you're going", she said. As the week progressed, I started making new friends, challenging myself in new ways, and doing things I've never done before. By week's end, I picked up my first lobster, dissected my first squid, and made friends with kids who I still keep in touch with today. I fell in love with Project Oceanology and I've been returning ever since.

Over the past eight years, the time I've spent at Project Oceanology helped influence me to become who I am today. I was a shy kid growing up, always keeping my thoughts and ideas to myself, afraid of getting laughed at. Through trust and teambuilding activities my confidence grew and I grew comfortable in my own skin. My leadership skills developed along with my self-assurance. Inspired by and equipped with my camp experiences, I applied for and got hired as a Junior Camp Counselor after my freshman year of high school. I wanted to help give other children the same amazing opportunities that I was given. I stayed on as a Junior Counselor through my senior year, and got hired as a Marine Science Education Intern after my freshman year of college.

Academically speaking, Project Oceanology opened my eyes to marine science. The staff instilled in me a passion and respect for the ocean and everyone and everything that depend on it. After spending so much time at Project Oceanology, I knew that I wanted to spend my life learning about and protecting the world's oceans.

Today, I'm a third year student at UConn, happily majoring in environmental science, with a concentration in biology. I find myself well prepared for much of my course work because I've already learned many of the topics and lab skills covered, at Project Oceanology. I've found great joy helping my classmates and friends, less experienced in the field, learn much of the material and study for exams. I've even been able to help teach my friends topics in biology classes I haven't taken yet.

Project Oceanology isn't just a learning institution for me; it's like a home away from home. It's been the highlight of my summers and continues to bring a smile to my face. Over the years the staff have watched me grow into who I am today, and I've made so many friends along the way. My experiences at Project Oceanology helped shape me as a student, and more importantly, a person. I've only been here for eight summers of Project Oceanology's 43-year history, but I feel as though I've already accumulated a lifetime's worth of lessons and memories.

Without grant funding, it would have been fiscally impossible for my parents to send me to Project Oceanology. What a shame that would've been. Who would I be? Where would I be? What would I be studying? I'm thankful I never had to find out. Your funding gave thousands of students just like me the chance to do the impossible. It gave us the chance to be someone we never could have been.

In lieu of Governor Malloy's proposed IDCG budget cuts, I implore you to increase grant funding so that programs like the Ocean Diversity Institute can continue to be funded state wide. It is paramount that program providers like Project Oceanology and individual school systems be

given the opportunity to apply for state funding so that students across the state can broaden their educational horizons. The State Department of Education should be in charge of IDCG funding, not the Governor.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, for you cutting IDCG funding is just cutting money. For students, it's cutting dreams.