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Testimony Supporting HB 5551, SB 379, and SB 376

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Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez and I am an Associate Commission Analyst with the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). LPRAC supports **HB 5551: AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS**, **SB 379: AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE**, and **SB 376: AN ACT CONCERNING STATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION**.¹

Regarding HB 5551

Connecticut needs more minority teachers, math and science teachers, and teachers wanting to work in the state's low-income school districts, which are predominately in our urban areas. This bill proposes various financial and professional incentives to encourage teachers to move to shortage areas. Sadly, none of these proposals speaks to the core motivation for why the majority of teachers want to teach.

Teachers become teachers to teach children and improve the lives of children. Largely, people do not become teachers because they want a high salary. They do not spend their weekends grading papers because they want to live in a supersized McMansion. They are not thinking about career ladders when they choose to work with multiple classes of twenty to thirty children every day. Teachers want to make a difference in the lives of children and we need to create incentives that foster a teacher's ability to do just that. LPRAC agrees that the incentives proposed in HB 5551 should be considered; however, we are missing the mark if we do not offer an incentive that empowers teachers to have more tangible input in how best to improve the lives of the hundreds of children they work with daily. The best way to increase the number of teachers in urban school districts may be to transition existing schools to teacher-led schools where teachers have more autonomy.²

In Boston, Mission Hill is a K-8 inner-city school that is teacher-led and has a high level of teacher autonomy.³ **98 percent** of their 8th graders go on to college after graduating from high school.⁴ It is one of several teacher-led schools in the Boston Public Pilot School Network. It is not a charter school.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the sources of information used in this testimony can be found in LPRAC's 2016 *Legislative Policy Agenda* at,

https://www.cga.ct.gov/lprac/docs/2016/LPRAC_2016Agenda_Web_08Jan2016.pdf

² <http://www.teachpowered.org/about>

³ The Boston Pilot Schools Network at, <http://www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/schools.html> and

<http://www.ccebos.org/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.whcc.com/article/stories/s3941923.shtml>

“The Pilot Schools are a network of public schools unique in the nation in that they have autonomy ... while operating within the economy of scale of a large urban public school district. These conditions have been found to be critical in creating successful urban schools, and in particular, in improving the achievement of low-income students and students of color.”⁵

This committee, the State Board of Education, and the Connecticut Department of Education should begin immediately to determine how best to implement teacher-led schools in the Commissioner’s Network of Schools and replicate the success of inner-city schools in Boston. Teacher autonomy is a non-monetary incentive; new school buildings are not needed; and we have concrete examples to draw from only a two-hour drive from Hartford. Please include **teacher-led schools** as part of the Commissioner’s Network of Schools.

Regarding SB 379

I have been fortunate to represent LPRAC on the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force. Several education professionals have provided information to the task force and their comments have been enlightening.

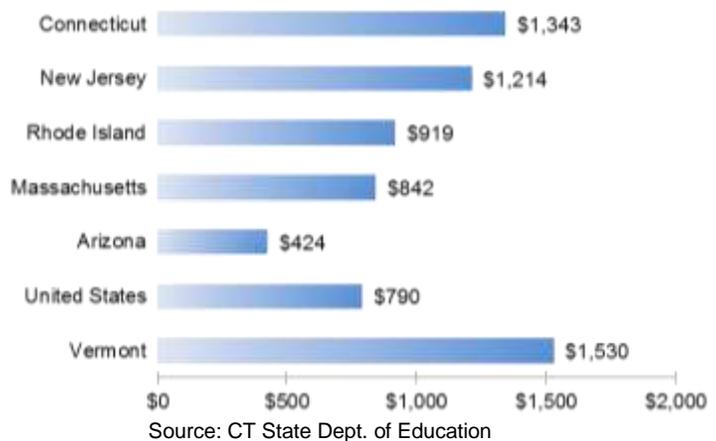
The final report from the task force is forthcoming. LPRAC’s concern has been that Connecticut may have an unnecessarily high barrier to teacher certification requiring credentials that do not necessarily result in better teachers. On the surface, some of our certification requirements appear to be subjective and excessive compared to requirements in other states. This may partially explain the shortage of minority teachers in the state. I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Sarah Barzee, of the Connecticut State Department of Education, who understands the need to “right-size” our teacher certification requirements.

We would like this task force to continue its investigations and that it broadens its mandate to look into barriers to recruiting minority *administrators*, such as principals, who also are underrepresented in the state’s public school districts.

Regarding HB 376

On average in 2013, Connecticut spent \$16,663 per pupil on K-12 education, which was the 4th highest per pupil spending among the states. For K-12 administration (school administration + general administration), Connecticut spent \$1,343 per pupil ranking 3rd highest. Continued funding of K-12 education at this level is problematic given the state’s forecast for an accumulated deficit of \$6.5 billion for fiscal years 2016 through 2020. At the same time as the state is experiencing budget deficits, fifty-five towns were **overfunded** by a total of \$25 million for K-12 education in this 2015-2016 fiscal year. Furthermore, the state spent millions of dollars on a Uniform Chart of Account system meant to bring transparency and accountability to education finance yet it has not been implemented.

**K-12 per Pupil Administrative Spending
2013**



⁵ Center for Collaborative Education at http://www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/pilot_qa.doc

While some municipalities have budget surpluses, others are not spending all the K-12 education funding provided by the state. The state's Alliance Districts did not spend \$9.2 million given to them by the state in 2014-2015 and some school districts are diverting education funding to inappropriate purposes. Because of the magnitude of unspent education monies, the Connecticut State Department of Education is recommending that towns be allowed to carryover as much as 3 percent of their Alliance funding from the prior year. East Haven, New Haven, and Norwalk had carryovers of more than 20 percent of their Alliance District funds in 2014-2015. Some of the poorest school districts left education monies unspent when the state had the highest achievement gap nationwide between white and Hispanic students in 8th grade math and the 4th highest gap in 8th grade reading.

Connecticut has among the highest per pupil spending in the country on K-12 education; yet the system is chaotic, opaque, and lacks accountability. We must require transparency, accountability, and rational in the state's K-12 education funding system.

LPRAC is grateful to this committee for its ongoing focus on the needs of Latinos throughout Connecticut. Our board has made it clear that improving K-12 education outcomes is a top priority for Latinos in Connecticut and that how K-12 education monies are being spent is as important as how much is spent.