

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE NOMINATIONS
COMMITTEE**

**Susannah M. Beyl, Nominee for Student Member of the State Board of Education
February 18, 2016**

Good morning, Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Susannah Beyl and it is my pleasure to address you today. I have had the distinct privilege and honor of serving as a student member of the State Board of Education since July 1, 2015.

I am a senior at West Haven High School, where I have had the fortune of enjoying all four of my high school years. My high school is truly the epitome of the State Department of Education's spirited goal: to give students access to the resources and opportunities needed to pursue their passions. It is within the classrooms of West Haven High School that I have researched my interests, alongside its enthusiastic teachers that I have explored my civic mindedness, within its hallways that I have greeted and joked with my friends, and among its diverse student body that I have developed my social conscience. My four years of high school have allowed me to be an activist, a student, a musician, an educator, an actress, a regional campaign leader, an attorney (mock trial), a representative, and a leader--and I *just* turned eighteen. I am enjoying the fruits of the State Department of Education's labor in the form of being able to chase my passions without boundaries, with my fellow Westies, both students and staff by my side cheering me on. Such an experience, I believe, is the essence of education, which I have been afforded the chance to expand to the rest of Connecticut's students as a student member of the State Board of Education. For four years, I have served as Class President. I have taken advantage of this position to deviate from the regular course of office. I have paid particular attention to the interests and requests of the staff and students to re-design and sometimes even replace our classic schoolwide fundraisers and events. This effort has resulted in one of my school's most collectively represented, and thus enthusiastic

and active, student bodies. With a school as beautifully diverse as my own, finding mutuality can be difficult, but the outcome, unifying a body of people, is extraordinary. I keep this goal in mind in all of my leadership endeavors to ensure that my influence is impartial to any particular group and will produce widespread optimization.

Serving on the State Board of Education among such distinguished professionals has been nothing slight of wonderful. I feel included and welcomed to a team that has one interest in mind: the best for Connecticut's students. At Board meetings, I listen with a keen ear and process the information presented through multiple lenses: first through my own perspective as a student and then as a student with demographics and personal logistics that are in stark contrast with mine. Connecticut's student body is extremely diverse and cannot be represented by one "average" student's profile. What makes public education reform so challenging, particularly in Connecticut, is this exact dilemma. Despite the achievement gap's startling and seemingly static presence in the state, all students, regardless of where they fall on the educational achievement spectrum, must be provided with the most thorough education available. I dedicate much of my role on the Board to ensuring that all students' needs are being met by their public education and that no student's potential goes unexplored.

Simply put, as a student, I know how it feels to spend 50 hours a week with peers, lessons, and adults. As a student member on the Board, I have and will continue to have conversations, do research, and serve communities to ensure that Connecticut students are the absolute best that they can be.

I would like to thank you all for allowing me the time to speak before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.