



State of Connecticut

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Testimony

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Senate Minority Leader Len Fasano

Education Committee

H.B. No. 5550 An Act Concerning Various Revisions and
Additions to the Education Statutes

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle, thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. No. 5550 An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes. Today I would like to focus my testimony on Section 12 of the bill, which allows for the establishment of a Pipeline for Connecticut's Future program.

This proposal is part of a compilation of proposals I'm developing and hoping lawmakers will pursue this year to break the cycle of poverty in our state and strengthen our cities so that all people, no matter where they were born and no matter where they live, can embrace their right to opportunity in this great nation.

The Pipeline for Connecticut's Future is one piece of a much larger puzzle that needs to be put together to address education needs in our cities.

In today's world, receiving a bachelor's degree is no longer a guarantee that one will be employed upon graduation. In fact, 37% of those that graduate with a bachelor's degree are underemployed six years after they received said degree.¹ Instead of focusing only on college preparation, we need to expand our approach in high school to show students that there is a future and there are good jobs even if you don't go to college.

This proposed program would provide a direct pipeline of qualified employees for any company by incentivizing local school districts to develop partnerships with local businesses and develop curriculum to train high school students specifically for the business community's needs upon graduation.

This homegrown program would provide a double benefit for the State of Connecticut. It will allow companies to fill vacant positions in their workforce with an employee trained specifically for that job while providing direct employment opportunities for Connecticut youth as well promoting entrepreneurship among high school students.

¹ Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University

This program would be modeled after the initiative that is currently underway in towns like Wallingford and the Platt Technical High School in Milford where local manufacturers are working collaboratively with the superintendent of schools in their joint effort to get kids that may not be interested in attending college to graduate with a specific, manufacturing related career path in mind and ultimately to be employed by the participating companies. The programs entail both industry-specific class time as well as cooperative work placements. In addition to the work performed at the local high schools, these programs also provide incubator space for entrepreneurs to work collaboratively and innovatively with students.

While the Wallingford and Platt programs are geared specifically towards manufacturing, it is imperative to educate towards a certificate statewide. Whether it is manufacturing, computer programming, auto mechanic, culinary arts, etc. students should graduate from high school with not only a diploma but also either a certificate or with skillsets necessary to begin a career.

The Connecticut Technical High Schools are beyond capacity and currently have of waitlist of over 3,000 students for 9th grade. This is unacceptable. Not all children want to or can afford to go to college. Young adults should be acquiring the skills that they need to support themselves and, eventually, a family. All public high schools should have technical classes and programming available for its students. Given the number of forward-thinking students that are already seeking career education at the high school level, it is a disservice that all schools do not offer such programs.

In addition, the Pipeline for Connecticut's Future also would operate in conjunction with a brownfield proposal I've proposed that is currently before the Commerce Committee. The 7/7 Problem Property Development Initiative would incentivize brownfield remediation in our cities by streamlining the clean-up process and providing tax credits and incentives. Benefits will only be granted to participating businesses should they chose to engage in an education pipeline program by:

- 1) Submitting to area high schools and community technical college systems their anticipated workforce needs and projected job requirements. This would allow these entities to develop and tailor curriculum specific to the job needs of the local business.
- 2) The company must certify that it will hire 30% of their total workforce from the local community through the programs that were developed specifically for that company.

By linking an education pipeline program to a business development incentive plan we can create an effective synergy to grow jobs as well as a talented young workforce.

In addition to the Pipeline for Connecticut's Future, I also would like to take the opportunity today to speak about a few additional education proposals I hope the Committee can consider this year to further enhance education in our cities. These include the expansion of Open Choice and the remarketing of the existing Community School Program

To expand the educational opportunities for children in our state I believe we should be focusing on growing Open Choice. Currently, this policy of allowing students to choose schools in their districts to attend is only voluntary. I propose requiring municipalities to provide open choice to residents so that if there is a lower performing neighborhood school that a parent does not want to send their child to, they can choose another school in district for their child's education. My proposal also has a component to help those schools that are not often chosen by students. When a school loses 20% of their children to another school, the state would incentivize teachers to work at the lower-performing school with enhanced salaries. In addition, the state

would research and determine the top three reasons why that particular public school has lost such a significant amount of “local” children, thereby allowing the school administrators and teachers to effectively map out a specific, targeted plan for improvement.

I also believe our state can encourage a ground-up approach to solving perceived educational issues in a community by refocusing on the Community School Program which has shown to be effective in many communities in many states. Community schools are public schools that participate in a coordinated, community-based effort with community partners to provide comprehensive educational and wrap-around services to students and their families all at one location. Current state law allows local or regional board of educations to establish a community school. However, I don’t believe it is a path that many are unaware exists in our state. This proposal seeks to expand the marketing of this program as it may prove to be a useful tool in increasing community empowerment and helping not only children, but also supporting their parents and families to create a more cohesive, positive experience in school as well as in the home.

I thank the Committee for raising a proposal that seeks to establish a pipeline program for Connecticut cities. I encourage the Committee to review and consider the additional ideas I’ve raised today regarding education reform and hope to continue the dialogue with all members to strengthen education for all students. We need to show each and every child in this state that they have an opportunity to succeed, learn and thrive.

Thank you.



Len Fasano
Senate Minority Leader