

HB 5551 OPPOSE

HB 5551 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg and respected members of the CT Education Committee, I write to present my testimony in **OPPOSITION to HB 5551**.

I **OPPOSE** having local control being taken away from district. No government agency should have the power to take over a local public school without any input from the local elected officials and tax payers.

As a CT Parent and taxpayer, I oppose having my property taxes manipulated to benefit private/political interests. I oppose having my taxes used in any way that excludes my representation. I oppose legislation designed to fail and seize our public schools, whereby losing our local control, parental input and elected boards. Our public schools, local control, elected boards of education, property taxes and representation should not be available for the co-opting of investors.

HB 5551 is indicative of a Commissioner of Education that elevates the interests of private investors and political agendas over true public schools and the taxpayers whom fund them. I respectfully ask the Education Committee to act within your authority to re align the Commissioner with the will of The People, democracy and the law. Please reexamine the obvious influence that big business has on CT legislation.

For detailed research and explanation, I respectfully ask that the Education Committee refer to the research of CT's Wendy Lecker, Senior Attorney of the Education Law Center and Jonathan Pelto, former CT State Representative and ranking majority leader. Their research lays clear how paid lobbyists and the charter industry (ConnCan in particular) seek to undermine CT public education in the interest of profit and power.

“Warning CT-They’re Coming for Your Schools and Your Democratic Rights!”

<http://jonathanpelto.com/2016/03/06/warning-connecticut-coming-schools-democratic-rights/>

Thank you for your representation of CT taxpayers and CT public education.

Respectfully,

Cheryl Hill

WARNING Connecticut –
They are coming for your schools and your democratic rights!

Mar 06 A Breaking News Alert from Jonathan Pelto and Wendy Lecker
<http://jonathanpelto.com/2016/03/06/warning-connecticut-coming-schools-democratic-rights/>

When it comes to public education in Connecticut, a new piece of legislation before the Connecticut General Assembly ([H.B. 5551](#)) would be the **most far-reaching power grab in state history – a direct attack local control of schools, our democracy and Connecticut’s students, parents, teachers, local school officials and public school.**

The legislation, would enable Malloy’s political appointees on the State Board of Education to takeover individual schools in a district, remove the control of the elected board of education, “suspend laws” and eliminate the role of school governance councils which are the parent’s voice in school “turnaround plans.

The bill is nothing short of an authoritarian maneuver by grossly expanding the Commissioner of Education’s powers under the Commissioner’s Network. **The bill destroys the fundamental role of local control because it allows the state to indefinitely take over schools and even entire districts, without a vote of local citizens.**

The bill removes any time limit on Commissioner’s Network Schools. It removes the cap on how many Commissioner’s Network schools can be taken over by the state. It removes the right of the local community to appoint their own turnaround committee. It eliminates the requirement that local parents, through their school governance council are included in the process.

This plan contravenes all the evidence on state takeovers.

State takeovers of schools and districts have been an abject failure across the country.

In Newark and Paterson, New Jersey, where state takeover has been in effect for years, the districts are plagued by fiscal crises, lack of improvement in student outcomes and charges of mismanagement.

A recent report issued by the Center for Popular Democracy found that state takeovers in New Orleans, Michigan’s Education Achievement Authority, and Tennessee’s Achievement School District, have all been plagued by mismanagement, instability and high turnover and hiring of inexperienced teachers, and virtually no student improvement.

<https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/National%20Takeover%20Ed%20Report.pdf>

In fact, even the federal government has found that states do not have the expertise to successfully turn around low-performing schools. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/most-states-lacked-expertise-to-improve-worst-schools/2015/05/05/0eb82b98-f35f-11e4-bcc4-e8141e5eb0c9_story.html

Connecticut's track record on taking over schools is anything but stellar. In fact, one of the first Commissioner's Network school, handed over to Jumoke/FUSE failed miserably under the supposed watchful eye of the Commissioner and State Board of Education. The charter network admitted it was "winging it," hiring ex-convicts, mismanaging funds and allowing student test scores to drop precipitously. Even the current principal, Karen Lott, admitted that the takeover was a failure, with only 13% of Milner's students scoring proficient in Language Arts and a shocking 7% in Math. Lott declared that what the school needed was experienced staff, additional resources and community support, particularly wrap-around social services. <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Wendy-Lecker-Failure-as-a-model-for-Connecticut-6267220.php>.

None of these inputs require state takeover. In fact takeovers have been characterized by hiring inexperienced teachers, and disenfranchising the local community.

Where would such an un-American, anti-democracy and anti-local control idea come from?

This bill is virtually a carbon copy of ConnCAN's proposal for the Commissioner's Network schools. <http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/7c/c/2766/255496644-ConnCAN-Turnaround-Report.pdf> ConnCAN cherry picked and misrepresented certain "case studies" and, as per usual, passed it off as "research."

For an example of **ConnCAN's misrepresentation of its case studies**, read the truth about Lawrence Massachusetts here. <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Wendy-Lecker-The-collateral-damage-of-a-district-6295743.php>

ConnCAN not only wrote a proposal shockingly identical to this bill , the charter lobby also sponsored a "forum" for legislators in 2015 where it invited Ms. Lott of the failed Milner school and others, such as the deputy superintendent of Lawrence to speak to legislators.

However the true examples of following **ConnCAN's** prescription can be found in places like Detroit, where the emergency manager left under a cloud and Detroit's schools are on the brink of collapse, and in Tennessee where the superintendent, Chris Barbic, resigned, admitting turnaround was "much harder" than he thought.

Why would ConnCAN, the charter lobby, push this proposal?

Because state takeovers have been characterized by **conversion of public schools into charter schools; schools unaccountable to elected boards, with little duty to report on its finances, yet who receive**

millions in public funds. Charters also tend to exclude a district's neediest children, without any accountability for these practices.

This is the second recent example of the **Malloy administration ceding governmental tasks to ConnCAN**. As was reported Friday, the Malloy administration allowed **ConnCAN** to choose at least one candidate for State Board of Education. (link)

Now, **ConnCAN is writing legislation** to determine the fate of our poorest schools. **ConnCAN is a lobby for charter schools**. The world outside Hartford recognizes **ConnCAN** as charlatan organization. It has received the Bunkum Award for shoddy research from the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado.

It is beyond troubling that our education policy is being set by this lobbying front group.

Without any evidence that destroying local control will help students (in fact with most evidence pointing the other way) why would we cede more power to the Commissioner?

Why do we think people who live and work in poor communities do not know what their children and schools need? As longtime teacher, professor and writer Mike Rose has written,

“We have a long-standing shameful tendency in America to attribute all sorts of pathologies to the poor... We seem willing to accept remedies for the poor that we are not willing to accept for anyone else.”

Our neighbors in our poorest communities know what their children need. Their teachers and principals and all the dedicated staff in their schools know, too. In fact, since early February they have been testifying, along with real national experts, in front of Judge Moukawsher in the CCJEF case about what their schools need to improve: smaller classes, more teachers, social workers, prek, wraparound services for kids and families, adequate facilities and more.

As Milner's principal stated, struggling schools need money, a stable staff and community support. State takeover will not accomplish these goals.

What will?

Providing schools the supports Ms. Lott mentions; supports that have been proven to improve schools. https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout_e.pdf

How do we provide these resources?

Several recent longitudinal studies prove that school finance reform where states substantially increase funding for struggling schools raises achievement.

http://eml.berkeley.edu/~jrothst/workingpapers/LRS_schoolfinance_feb2016.pdf;

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w20847>.

The legislature can truly impact student performance by settling the CCJEF case and enacting real finance reform to fund Connecticut schools adequately.

What the legislature should NOT do is replicate failure. And that is what Raised Bill 5551 will do.

Governor Malloy and his administration are apparently doing the bidding of ConnCAN and the rest of the charter industry.

It is the legislature's duty to act on behalf of the children in this state on behalf of taxpayers, and on behalf of democracy.

Connecticut needs elected officials with integrity and clarity of vision to once and for all, to examine the evidence and protect the interests, not of high-priced lobbyists, but of those children most in need of protection.

For more about how ConnCAN, the charter school industry and the corporate education reformers are corrupting Connecticut politics and policy read – [Malloy turns to charter school industry for names to appoint to the CT State Board of Education](#)