

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



J. BRENDAN SHARKEY
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

March 7, 2017

Good Afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am here to testify in support of two bills, today: **HB 5554, AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONAL EDUCATION** and **HB 5556, AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGIONAL UNIFORM SCHOOL CALENDAR**.

House Bill 5554 reflects the recommendations of the MORE Commission's Education Policy Working Group. Throughout 2015, the Working Group convened stakeholders from across Connecticut - holding presentations by state and regional institutions, municipal officials, policy experts and statisticians.

As this committee is well aware, school construction is a responsibility of the state which is somewhat unique to Connecticut. Nevertheless, the bond authorization process demands terrific amounts of oversight and planning. One component of that process that the Working Group examined was the need for more accurate student enrollment projections – in an effort to cost-effectively build facilities to accurate community specifications while limiting the need for costly changes to projects when projections do not pan out and facilities are overbuilt.

Section 1 of this bill will require the Commissioner of Administrative Services to consult with the State Data Center at the University of Connecticut to review enrollment projections and to assist DAS with an annual regional school capacity assessment. Schools in close proximity will be better able to share data on capacity and potential closures while planning agencies will be better equipped to foster opportunities for inter-district cooperation.

Sections 2 and 3 expand the ability of school districts to contract with Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) for the provision of administrative services. Currently, districts are permitted to share the staffing of a superintendent but the language before you would expand RESC agreements to critical services in the areas of human resources, financial management, information technology services and compliance.

Finally, this bill will modify reporting requirements for districts that have entered into regional cooperative arrangements. Local and regional districts are currently pooling resources to fund comprehensive services, across grades and town lines, with the greatest economy of scale while still retaining local control for boards of finance. One hindrance, however, is for these

districts to disaggregate these expenses for reporting purposes. This bill would allow cooperative arrangements, for the purpose of reporting only, to be treated more like a district in and of itself.

I would like to thank the committee for raising House Bill 5556, as well, as it improves upon the uniform regional calendar previously adopted by the General Assembly. This bill improves its implementation by requiring all regional calendars to permit flexible days for local districts. This will afford communities the ability to observe religious holidays and honor local traditions and has the added benefit of bringing more districts into compliance.

Furthermore, this bill will end the state's costly practice of subsidizing inefficiencies by penalizing districts that are not in compliance with the provisions of the uniform regional calendar starting with the 2017/18 school year. This bill also improves upon reporting requirements of the Commissioner of Education with an evaluation of efficiencies gained through the use of a uniform regional calendar.

While the added penalty may not be welcomed by districts struggling to adopt a common calendar, I am willing to discuss ways for more districts to come into compliance through modifications to this bill, as it moves forward. For example, the Cooperative Education Services region could achieve 100% compliance simply by permitting neighboring districts to adopt alternate starting dates for their school calendar while also aligning their Spring vacations.

I thoroughly appreciate your attention to these regional initiatives as we must universally seek efficiencies and savings for our towns and the state of Connecticut.

Sincerely,



J. Brendan Sharkey

Speaker of the House of Representatives