

Dear Committee members,

I would like to support the testimony to provide high school students a Seal of Biliteracy on their diplomas. I pursued language in college and have enjoyed an international career and level of global awareness that has enriched my life in many ways. Learning foreign languages is hard. It requires a lot of work, some aptitude and tremendous motivation. I recall in high school many students who disliked languages because it was too hard and/or they didn't care enough.

The kids who can do it and do care should receive the highest level of recognition and encouragement. These are the people who are going to build bridges, and be an inspiration to people who come after them. I live in a town which is very dedicated to the pursuit of language excellence. Last year, my son was one of 3 students at Glastonbury High School who received a full scholarship to study as part of a national study abroad program sponsored by the US Department of State (NSLI-Y). This may be the most students from any single high school in the US to be picked for this very selective program.

These were not kids on a nice trip to Spain or Italy. These were kids who went to places like Tajikistan, Oman and India to learn critical languages for our national security. That security belongs to all of us. My son gave up Internet, air conditioning and shorts in 100 degree weather to spend 6 weeks studying Persian, a language critical to understanding and fostering our security with Afghanistan and Iran. He also studied Russian for 6 years in the Glastonbury School System -- another language critical to our country's security. He has taken this in addition to a full honors courseload. He has had no lunch period in high school to do so -- I am thankful he is so self-motivated. The time, effort and enthusiasm he brought to learning these difficult languages (in addition to studying 12 years of Spanish, which is our country's second language) should receive permanent recognition.

On a personal note, I studied Russian in college and worked in Moscow for several years during the height of the Cold War. I believe in my heart that I played a small role in the peaceful dissolution of USSR, as a young American who displayed enthusiasm for their language and culture. I also worked for a CT-based global company (UTC) whose business contributed to the growth of many emerging markets.

I am glad to speak with any member of the committee about why language mastery is crucial to our national security, the opening of global markets and the development our character.

Thank you,

Myra Lee