

March 10, 2016

## TESTIMONY ON HB 5602

### AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONALISM

Chairman Osten, Chairman Miller, Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

My name is Fran Rabinowitz, and I am the interim Superintendent of the Bridgeport Public Schools, the largest unified public school district in the state of Connecticut with more than 21,000 students in our school system.

I testify today in support of HB 5602 and specifically for one change to section 5 of this bill. I would propose one minor change in language that would allow school districts or boards of education to apply for grants directly from the Regional Performance Incentive Program for the purpose of regionalizing certain educational services.

School districts have tremendous potential to offer needed regional services to each other. I believe we should be allowed to apply for funds from the Regional Performance Incentives Program in order to make that happen.

There are many areas of common need in the areas of professional development and specific programs for students. For instance, special education has become an out of control expense in many districts. What if individual districts were able to offer specific, short-term behavioral intervention programs for students designed to deal with traumas and aggressive behaviors, proactively preventing the permanent and expensive 'Special Education' label from being applied? An example might be a therapeutic behavior intervention program which provided students short term, intensive strategies to bring their emotions under control with the explicit goal of returning those students to their own schools. I believe a program such as this would be good for many students and could save many school districts millions of dollars.

Other regional education programs started by one district might be in the arts, technology and the trades. We have an Aquaculture Program in Bridgeport where students from area districts attend for part of the day and take courses in maritime science from experts. It is a true regional program, exposes students to learning that would not be available in their own district and is certainly cost effective for all involved school districts.

Every school system has staff with specific expertise. Funding from the Regional Performance Incentives Program directly to a school district with solid ideas for regional solutions would allow us to pool resources with other districts. These funds could be used to develop and implement programs and training that would be of enormous benefit to staff and students across multiple districts and, at the same time, would provide economic relief at a time when it is so needed.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these ideas and I urge passage of this bill.