

March 6, 2017

Testimony RE Governor's Senate Bill 786
An Act Concerning Mandate Relief, Transparency and Regional Incentives

Lesley Mitchell Jones
Partner & Senior VP (retired)
Reich & Tang Asset Management, LP

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher and distinguished members of the Education Committee,

Norwich, CT, is my hometown. For 30 years I lived and worked in New York. Norwich Free Academy was and continues to be my high school. I am a current Norwich Free Academy Corporator, a former Norwich Free Academy Foundation, Inc., Board Member (15 years), a donor, a future endowment donor, and a loyal member of the Class of 1966.

I am staunchly opposed to Governor's Senate Bill 786 and the sections which directly affect independently governed, privately endowed academies in Connecticut.

I would like to put on record my most adamant opposition. The words I would use to describe any attempt to compromise Norwich Free Academy's independence are 'abhorrent and unprecedented.' In my retirement in Florida, I am a community activist passionately involved in secondary education. Personal and professional experience informs my position.

Independence has allowed Norwich Free Academy to remain focused upon its mission, free from the often distracting and energy-diverting concerns of politics, local and personal interests, and ethical conflict. In fact, in 1854 such political wrangling gave birth to NFA's independence. The institution has been operating independently for 160 years; it has performed exceptionally well serving a public population that otherwise would not have the opportunities that Norwich Free Academy offers. I am a direct benefactor of the NFA academic brand.

In part, those opportunities are funded by private alumni dollars like mine. I donate to the Norwich Free Foundation, Inc., through the annual NFA Fund and I am considering a substantial future endowment donation because as a finance professional I know my money will be prudently managed to provide opportunities to students far into the future by the independently governed Norwich Free Academy.

From a legislator's point of view, please do not miss the value of out-of-state dollars supporting the education of students in Norwich and the surrounding communities.

Any compromise of Norwich Free Academy's independence would have a chilling effect upon donor dollars, indeed. The long-term effect would be less support for the institution; less support, ultimately, means a reduced program or higher tuition. Will the state of Connecticut provide complete reparation for the loss of donor dollars that the overreach of Senate Bill 786 will cause?

By all means, please do not try to fix what is not broken.