



**Jennifer Alexander, ConnCAN**

**Regarding**

**Education Committee, House Bill 7255, House Bill 7251 and House Bill 7253**

**3/16/17**

Members of the Education Committee, Co-Chairs Rep. Fleischmann, Sen. Slossberg, Sen. Boucher and Ranking Member Rep. Lavielle, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jennifer Alexander, I am the CEO of ConnCAN, a statewide non-profit organization that has spent the last decade fighting to ensure that all kids in Connecticut have access to a great public education.

Today, I am here to testify about three bills, *House Bill 7255, An Act Establishing A Task Force to Conduct a Feasibility Study Regarding the Creation of a Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative* and *House Bill 7251, An Act Concerning Reform District Turnarounds* and *House Bill 7253, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes*.

***House Bill 7255: An Act Establishing A Task Force to Conduct a Feasibility Study Regarding the Creation of a Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative***

This bill proposes a task force to examine the feasibility of creating a special education predictable cost cooperative. We support this effort and urge the proposed task force to act quickly to take the necessary and long-overdue actions to make special education costs more predictable, sustainable and manageable at the local level while also ensuring quality services for children.

***House Bill 7253: An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes***

Sec. 11 of this bill proposes allowing local or regional board of education to establish a Pipeline for Connecticut's Future program in which a local or regional

board of education would partner with one or more local businesses to offer on-site training and course credit to students. We appreciate this step to help students prepare for success in careers. Now, more than ever jobs in CT will require education beyond high school and we need to make sure that our students have the knowledge and skills they'll need to compete and that Connecticut's employers have enough skilled workers. We urge those of you interested in this section of HB 7253 to also look at *Senate Bill 837, An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Opportunities For High Growth, High Demand Jobs*. Also, Sec. 2-3 of this bill would delay the requirement to obtain a master's degree related to teachers certification endorsement area in order to obtain professional certification from 7/1/16 to 7/1/18. As you are considering this bill, please note there is mixed research on the extent to which Master's degrees actually result in improved teaching and improved outcomes for kids. Implementing this requirement may not necessarily translate into more effective educator workforce. We need to ensure that our state's certification policies are aligned with effectiveness in the classroom and do not create illogical obstacles that prevent effective teachers from teaching or leading in our schools. We have discussed this in the past and urged the Committee to can improve our state's certification policies by easing restriction on licensure reciprocity to bring in qualified out-of-state educators. Similar work could be done in terms of degree and coursework requirements. Our state's teacher preparation policy in our state is improving, and we must to more to ensure all of our public schools have effective teachers and leaders.

### ***House Bill 7251: An Act Concerning Reform District Turnarounds***

About 4 in 10 Connecticut public school students attend school in Alliance Districts, the 30 lowest-performing districts in the state. Each and every one of these students deserves a great education. This proposal, intended to help improve district turnarounds, is a positive step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough to create the conditions needed to turnaround chronically struggling schools or districts. For example, we are encouraged that HB 7251 promotes a stronger state role and ability to step in if improvements are not made fast enough in our low-performing districts, as it would allow for the State Board of Education to require regional or local Board of Education to participate in trainings to improve efficiency and effectiveness. We also agree that Alliance District plans should be

developed based on performance data to help focus in on areas of need specific to the district based upon evidence.

A model school district responsibilities agreement as proposed in this bill could be stronger if it went beyond outlining areas of responsibility and treating all struggling districts the same and incorporated provisions that allow districts the flexibility and leadership they will need to enact major change based on best practices and tailored to local needs and context. The training requirements, as written, would provide governance training to all struggling districts and treat them the same. We encourage you to consider requiring the agreement on a case-by-case basis based on recommendation of the State Board of Education or the Commissioner rather than a one-size-fits-all requirement for all Alliance Districts.

While the proposal is encouraging, experience and results here in Connecticut and in other states suggest that we will not see substantial improvements in our persistently lowest-performing schools and districts unless substantial changes are made to our state's school and district turnaround policies. In 2015, ConnCAN released a report that highlighted eight policy recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the state's current school turnaround effort, the Commissioner's Network. As [our report](#) notes, states with bolder policies are making greater gains in their turnaround efforts. Such states include: Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Louisiana. For your reference, we attached our report, along with a [Washington Post piece](#) in which two state education chiefs, Mitchell Chester from Massachusetts and John White from Louisiana, outline the policy conditions necessary for effective turnarounds.

I know that some of you recently visited in the turnaround efforts in Lawrence, MA Public Schools or heard the Deputy Superintendent from Lawrence when he spoke to the Education Committee at the information hearing last year. There, a strong state turnaround policy and approach has enabled a talented team of teachers and leaders to do the hard work of turning the district around, Lawrence students have made strong gains. During the district's first two years of turnaround efforts, the percent of students who scored proficient or higher in math on state assessments increased by double digits. [The district has also made significant improvements in graduation rates and dropout rates.](#) The most recent data showed the 4-year

cohort graduation rate increased to 66.9% in 2014 from 52.3% in 2011, and the dropout rate declined from 8.6% in 2011 to 4.6% in 2014.

Our state needs strong laws and policies to create the conditions necessary to achieve and sustain bold improvements in our highest needs schools and districts. We urge the Committee to go farther than this proposed bill.