



State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 16, 2017

Testimony regarding H.B. No. 7251
AN ACT CONCERNING REFORM DISTRICT TURNAROUND PLANS.

Good morning/afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Vice Chairs and Members of the Education Committee. The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (“CHRO,” or “Commission”) is grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding H.B. No. 7251, which would enhance existing training for boards of education of under-performing school districts that are implementing improvement plans, require the Department of Education to create a model school district responsibilities agreement, and include such model agreement and leadership succession plans as part of a school district's alliance district plan.

As the state’s civil rights enforcement agency, the CHRO has a particular interest in any legislation affecting under-performing school districts, which are generally also the most impoverished school districts, with a disproportionately high population of minority students as compared to better-performing, wealthier school districts. The Commission supports the bill’s proposal to require boards of education to undergo training specifically designed to clarify the roles and functions of board members, particularly their obligation to design and implement improvement plans and education policy. Such training will better equip district leaders to create more focused strategic plans for reversing the trends of underachievement which have become all too common in many of these districts. The CHRO is also supportive of the second part of this proposed legislation, which would require the state Department of Education to develop a model school district responsibilities agreement. In addition to providing guidance for the training described above, such an agreement would require school superintendents and administrators to acknowledge by signature that they understand their respective roles and responsibilities with regard to their district’s improvement plan and policies. This kind of personal accountability is necessary to ensure that the school leaders realize that the objectives of the plans and policies are not merely words on a page, but actual goals that they are responsible for working toward.

The Commission has concerns regarding the proposed change to Section 3, which would require under-performing school districts seeking additional funding to submit applications which “include objectives and performance targets and a plan that are developed, in part, on the strategic use of student academic performance data.” The Commission would like the Committee to consider adding a definition of “strategic use of student academic performance data” to the bill, one that ensures that the most impoverished districts, which traditionally have the poorest academic performance, are not unfairly penalized for factors outside of their control. This definition is also necessary to prevent abuse in funding applications, i.e. to prevent “strategic” manipulation of student performance data in order to receive additional funding.

The CHRO **supports** H.B. No. 7251. The Commission thanks you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.