

WRITTEN TESTIMONY  
Education Committee Public Hearing  
March 16, 2017

H.B. No. 7255 (RAISED): AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY REGARDING THE CREATION OF A SPECIAL EDUCATION PREDICTABLE COST COOPERATIVE.

I am writing in opposition to Proposed H.B. No. 7255: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Conduct a Feasibility Study regarding the Creation of a Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative.

I am not confident that "establishing a task force" of a select group of education stakeholders will be able to conduct an honest, independent, and comprehensive study of special education funding practices that will result in improving the status of students with special needs in our State or helping parents who are desperate to procure meaningful educational services for their children. Having closely observed the way the Governor's Common Core Implementation Task Force and the Mastery Examination Task Force operated and reached their recommendations over the past few years has contributed to this lack of trust. These two task forces were loaded with stakeholders who had made their positions well known in oral testimony/written statements/media viewpoints before the committee even began their deliberations. Turning over such an important issue that impacts so many Connecticut students, families, and citizens to another task force that - in all likelihood - is simply looking to railroad its ideas through is a fatally flawed and irresponsible legislative action.

The Connecticut School Finance Project (CSFP), an outgrowth of CCER, has already been promoting its Special Education Co-op ideas and, based on recently disclosed FOIA information, members of the Governor's inner circle and CSFP advocates have been colluding in developing a new redistributive Special Education funding formula behind closed doors. Given past practices, I have no doubt that CCER, ConnCAN, CABE, Inc., CAPSS, and Achievement First, Inc., have not been kept out of the loop along with their accomplices at CSDE and CSBE. This is no way to determine education policy in our State.

Rather than pass the buck to the same group of culprits that make up these education task forces, legislators should approve the necessary expenditure for a comprehensive and independent Education Adequacy Cost Study which would be a much wiser course of action at this time. And, I stress the word *independent* because that has not unfortunately been the case on other task force committees.

There is clearly need to study and improve education funding issues that have been inadequately addressed and "kicked down the road" for years. However, a time of budget crisis is not the time to allow opportunistic groups to manipulate parts of a much broader system without any in-depth and future planning study. For emphasis, I repeat my testimony to this committee last week when I wrote: "In Mr. Jim Finley's written

testimony recently to the Appropriations Committee, he contended that 'for too long Connecticut has developed education funding policy backwards and without hard data'. He went on to say: 'An Education Adequacy Cost Study is the necessary prerequisite to developing a new, rational and constitutional education finance system in Connecticut.' "

There are many responsible voices in our State that have been speaking out trying to protect what-they-see as unfair and self-serving policy-making in the public education sphere whose concerns are systematically ignored while politically-engineered committees are directed to study a pressing issue. I hope you can hear this message and not submit another critical educational issue to a task force that will fail to provide an honest, independent, and comprehensive study.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this testimony.

Sincerely,  
John Bestor  
Cheshire, CT