

***Raised 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.

Testimony From:

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Former Committee Member *CT's System of General Supervision and Focus Monitoring* 2004-2012

Dear Education Committee:

This is my written testimony. I will not be testifying at the hearing regarding this Bill. I am against this Bill and urge you to vote NO and do not let it pass. While on its face the idea of conducting a task force to conduct a feasibility study regarding the creation of a Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative seems like it may be a good idea it is in fact a radical idea. It's born out of desperate circumstances due to the fiscal crisis we are having in this state.

I find it problematic for many reasons: It's a rogue proposal never been done by any other state and isn't a practice provided for under federal law. My concerns are not limited to the fact it's never been done but who the committee is comprised of and the fact that the State Advisory Council for Special Education was not on the list. This is the council/committee designed by federal statute to address systemic issues plaguing SPED to not have them on the list of members is a gross oversight. Also missing from the committee proposed for this study is students, parents and classroom educators. Further missing is a highly qualified independent Special Education attorney. What I mean by independent is an attorney versed in federal laws under IDEA one that is not working in this state. To have one that is working in this state may result in a conflict of interests.

It appears as though you have a bunch of bureaucrats from different agencies with conflicting interests and they will be fighting for their piece of the pie. The other big problem is that this study does not seem to get at the underlying exploding costs of Special education. I think a study that looks at root causes is far more sensible. This study seems to me to be all about the money and who is going to pay not what is the cause behind growing SPED costs. I highly

doubt the idea of being cooperative is going to happen under the circumstances define here. I have further concerns about the cost of this study and where the funds will come from. I guess it will be funded by the state. Again I'd rather see the state funding a study that looks into root causes.

This study aims to look at the "costs at the state level to compensate for volatility at the local level" it also looks to "providing predictability to local and regional boards of education or special education costs". If you understand SPED it is by nature volatile and providing predictability is not compatible with the nature of Special Education. Districts can't predict which students show up on their doorsteps and what those needs will be with any reasonable predictability. SPED is volatile because this cannot be systematically predicted due the reason stated above but also due to the changing needs of individual students. I'm afraid if this effort to provide predictability is enforced that it will create problems. I think you maybe are able to estimate at times but then districts could have one student show up unexpected and that could completely change the estimate at any given time. I don't know how one can "equitably distribute special education funding" based on the unpredictable inherent nature of SPED. I worry that districts will begin to make decisions based on a formula that is not a process defined in Federal Law. This is scary and may likely result in abuse.

Lastly, I have a concern if the vote is YES for this study to happen then the next step is that the state could be creating a cumbersome process not in alignment with federal laws even though this statue looks to protect from that happening. No other state has done this and we could potentially find ourselves in trouble by going down this road. I am also seriously concerned about the issues I have outlined herein my testimony and the possibility of other concerns not yet foreseen by starting down this path. For these reasons I urge you to vote NO! Please DO NOT pass Raised Bill HB No 7255.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanna Cooper