

TESTIMONY ON HB #7255 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY REGARDING THE
CREATION OF A SPECIAL EDUCATION PREDICTABLE COST COOPERATIVE

March 16, 2017

Good morning members of the Education Committee, Chairman Slossberg, Chairman Boucher, Chairman Fleischmann and Representative Lavielle, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of H.B 7255.

My name is Nathan Quesnel and I am the Superintendent of East Hartford Public Schools. This morning, I would like to say a few words regarding my early understanding of H.B. 7255, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Conduct a Feasibility Study Regarding the Creation of a Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative. As a public school district Superintendent, I am greatly interested in legislation centering on the funding structures for special education and I appreciate this committee's interest in potential solutions to the challenges currently facing CT schools. In East Hartford, we currently have over 1200 students receiving special education services in district with an additional 269 out of district placements. These services result in a cost to the district of over 24% of our current operating budget or nearly \$21 million dollars. It is also important to note that for the 269 outplaced special needs students in East Hartford, the district is currently spending nearly \$4 million dollars. While as an educator I deeply believe in providing the highest quality services to our children with special needs, in East Hartford, we continue to become concerned regarding capturing cost as well as being sure cost is predictable year to year.

H.B. 7255 allows for the study of an interesting concept that I believe should be fully reviewed and considered. This act provides the authority to create a task force to conduct a feasibility study to develop and introduce a Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative (the Co-op) which will enable state and local governments to share in special education costs while keeping decision making and controls at the local level. While the Co-op does not immediately cut or capture cost, the benefit we see in this proposal is a first attempt to highlight this significant financial issue, provide transparency and is to make districts' special education costs more predictable. As you know from the language of the bill, the Co-op brings together local and state contributions including a reallocation of the ECS grant. Importantly, the Co-op will not raise the total cost of special education statewide nor will it reduce state aid for special education.

H.B. 7255 allows an innovative concept to be thoroughly and deeply reviewed. As a practicing educator, I urge the General Assembly to embrace this concept and commit to developing a task force to fully develop and ripen this concept. While I believe that there are significant questions for local communities regarding this new concept, I believe that a public commitment to learning and communicating the broad base design could provide a potential pathway forward for our state and local school district. In taking this position, we are going with other educational leadership groups that encourage the establishment of the Cooperative after existing questions and potential ambiguities have been cleared. Establishing predictability at the school district level for the cost of programming for special needs children has been a long-sought goal for those who are responsible for operating school systems. The proposal for a Cooperative, if implemented appropriately, has the potential for the establishment of a system that meets this goal.

Thank you for your continued focus on improving the lives and opportunities of our Connecticut School children and for the time you took to listen to my thoughts this morning.