

Bill # 957

Good Afternoon, I am Lola Kovalski. I live in Manchester and attend a magnet school in Hartford. I am standing before you to advocate for the statewide expansion of computer science. Thanks to Mr. Veseski, my teacher, I am one of a handful of students to gain exposure in this field. Without his incessant nagging to "sign up for AP Computer Science," I would not be where I am today. Although I do not dream of spending my life writing algorithms, computational thinking is a marketable, critical, and necessary 21<sup>st</sup>-century skill.

My support of this bill boils down to two fundamental ideas: firstly, a basic understanding of this increasingly important sector of our economy is essential to our future livelihoods *and*, secondly, a mandated curriculum is an important way to eliminate the disparity in academic opportunities across gender, race, and socioeconomic status.

The acceleration of technological advances is rapidly changing the way we live and the jobs that will exist in the future. The skills that our jobs will require are completely different than the skills our parents and grandparents needed to master in order to prosper, yet there has been hardly any change to the public school curriculum. It's anticipated that my generation will be the first to do worse than our parents. Maybe ... but perhaps you can help by equipping us with the tools and knowledge that will help us succeed.

Now, onto my second point. Did you know that Staples High School in Westport offers students eight computer science related courses? Or that New Canaan High School offers its students eleven computer science related courses? How many courses do you think are offered to students who attend Bulkeley High School in Hartford, or East Hartford High School, or any inner city school for that matter? I can tell you - at most, one! And this is not ok.

Even within the schools that offer Computer Science, not every student is participating. This is best illustrated by the participation statistics of AP Computer Science across our state: Only 10.5% of test takers were Hispanic or Latino students; 4.5% of test takers were black; and 28%, a little over a quarter, of test takers were women. In other words, computer science is dominated by a specific group of people, and that is not good for the field nor the economy. There is a misconception among students that one needs to be a math genius to participate in computer science. This idea has dissuaded participation. Fortunately, a specific section of this bill helps to redefine what a computer scientist looks like. Making computer science available in every school, from elementary school to high school, helps to destigmatize it. The importance of early exposure is unparalleled and alters a child's career exploration process. I have taught over 80 young Hartford women how to code and watched a handful of them develop a genuine passion for computer science that they will likely carry with them for life.

While this law cannot fix the widespread educational inequality that exists, it represents an important first step in helping to better distribute academic opportunity. Requiring every school to provide students with a fundamental education in computing helps to even the playing field. Having an understanding of computer science should not be a privilege extended to a lucky few.

After all, our own state's Department of Education defines school as a place in which "important and relevant learning takes place." Learning computer science is both important and relevant. Therefore, adjusting the core curriculum to include computer science would demonstrate a commitment to these values.