

Testimony of Lon Seidman
Chairman, Essex Board of Education & Region 4 Supervision District

IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILLS HB 7353 and SB 1069

I write in support of HB 7353, "AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS ISSUES RELATING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION," and SB 1069, "AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES." Both bills will help begin breaking down statutory barriers to regional cooperation.

HB 7353 section 1 will have an immediate and positive impact for shared special education services. The bill expands the definitions of local and regional school districts for the purposes of special education to include cooperative agreements operating in compliance with 10-158(a) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Chester, Deep River, and Essex have long made use of 10-158(a) to share services among our local boards of education and the Region 4 board of education. We call our cooperative agreement the "Supervision District" and it manages a single central office along with dozens of shared services. Special education is one of the services we have centralized through our Supervision District.

Over the years we have hit many roadblocks with special education because the state has not recognized our collective efforts as a single entity. This has resulted in a less efficient operation that has to maintain redundancies in order to be compliant with state law.

The simple changes in HB 7353 will help us develop a much more efficient program in our towns that will also provide a better education to our special education students. We are grateful to the committee for raising this bill and urge your colleagues to support it. We are more than happy to share our experiences with other school districts that might wish to begin their own cooperative agreements to better control their special education costs.

SB 1069 requires the Department of Education to submit a report by the end of the year to the legislature in regards to cooperative agreements and the possibility of having those agreements recognized as school districts. We support this study and hope that it will lead to legislation next session to allow for more flexibility in defining school districts. We are ready and willing to provide our experience and expertise to the department as they begin this work.

Respectfully submitted,
Lon Seidman