March 6, 2019

Testimony of Craig Cooke, Ph.D, Superintendent, Windsor Public Schools

IN SUPPORT OF H.B. NO. 7258 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FIRM GRADUATION DATE AND THE DATE FOR THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL SESSIONS

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Dr. Craig A. Cooke, Superintendent for the Windsor Public Schools and I am here today on behalf of the Windsor Board of Education (WBOE) and as a member of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), to speak in support of H.B. NO. 7258 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FIRM GRADUATION DATE AND THE DATE FOR THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL SESSIONS.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Education Committee on this important topic for Windsor Public Schools and other districts throughout the state. I recognize you have many difficult decisions in front of you that bring a higher level of attention and of even more importance. However, this proposal does not bring with it a potential negative as so many others may. It would not require funding from the state but would, in fact, save school districts funding. It would benefit districts large and small and families throughout the state.

I am asking that you remove a portion of Section 10-161 of the General Statutes. This removal would allow school districts to set a firm graduation date at the start of the school year rather than after April 1st. Below is the language I am requesting to be removed:

3 Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes, [to the contrary], a local or regional board of education may establish for any school year a firm graduation date for students in grade twelve [which is no earlier than the one hundred eighty-fifth day noted in the school calendar originally adopted by the board for that school year, except that a board on or after April first in any school year may establish such a firm graduation date] for that school year which at the time of such establishment provides for at least one hundred eighty days of school.
There are many reasons why this proposal received full support by the Windsor Board of Education and then received support from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) during the delegate assembly. In my opinion, the top reasons are:

1. Allows for a cost effective venue suitable for the important occasion to be secured. Oftentimes, Windsor must place a hold at more than one venue due to available dates.
2. Allows families to plan travel 10 months in advance rather than 3 months in advance. For example, Windsor has families that travel from around the world. There is additional cost and stress by waiting to set the graduation date.
3. Ensures a timeframe that allows students entering the military early to graduate with the rest of their class.
4. Safe Graduation can book a venue and entertainment for the students.
5. Graduation date and venue would not be a concern during the time of cancelling school due to weather concerns.

Please keep in mind that this proposal still maintains the 180-day requirement for students in grades Prek-11. In the vast majority of instances, students in 12th grade, by mid to late June, have already made plans for the following year. There is little to no educational benefit by having the graduating seniors in school for a few more days. In fact, allowing them to graduate on the planned 180th day or later, will improve the school atmosphere for high schools and provide an incentive for 12th graders to complete their responsibilities on time.

This proposal has strong support from Windsor families, educators and the Board of Education. Superintendent colleagues that I have spoken with also support this proposal. I urge you to recommend that H.B. NO. 7258 be sent out of the Education Committee for a vote by legislators.

Thank you.