

**Testimony of
Catherine Aillon Pomo**

I'd like to thank the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission for giving us an opportunity to convene and comment on instrumental issues regarding Bilingual Education. My name is Catherine Aillon Pomo. I've worked at Windham Public Schools as a Dual Language Teacher for eight years and I'm currently the Instructional Consultant for North Windham School as well as a resident of Windham. I'm here as a representative of the Windham Federation of Teachers.

Our district of Windham has recognized the existence of an achievement gap for English Language Learners. As a district with the highest percentage of ELL students in the state, programs were built and resources were gathered to address this achievement gap, and to offer the children of our community bilingual programs that would foster native language literacy and promote their academic success in English. Unfortunately, our Dual Language program is currently the last standing bilingual program in one of our four elementary schools. Our already existing Transitional Bilingual Programs in Kindergarten to 2nd grade, and our New Arrivals Program for 3rd and 4th grade Spanish speaking students who are new to our community, were carelessly dismantled last year in three of our elementary schools by the State Department of Education appointed Special Master.

This left many of our Spanish speaking students stranded in classrooms to navigate a language they were not yet proficient in with minimal language supports while trying to learn academic concepts and skills. These cuts took place despite the fact that research supports that bilingual programs offer better outcomes through stronger language development and academic support than pull-out ESL models or English-only immersion models, and despite research showing that it takes a person 5-7 years to acquire a second language. This was done even though it's no secret that many of our ELL children not only have the challenge of learning a new language, but are also faced with the hurdle of poverty. Our children were intentionally marginalized and prevented from benefitting from the bilingual programs that were ALREADY in place. Our children were prevented from learning concepts and skills in their native language that would transfer to English and enhance their academic success. They were prevented from equal access to education, and their advantage of speaking a language other than English was quickly turned into a deficit. What was done to our children of Windham that were affected by these cuts was unconscionable.

Windham Federation of Teachers supports the efforts being made to create a Bureau of English Language Learners and supports initiatives to extend Bilingual Support from the current 30 month time period to a time period that is aligned with research with it being a minimum of 50 months. It is time that we have an ELL Bureau that can ensure that the proper supports, programs and resources are put into place and maintained to ensure the success of our ELL students and to encourage the implementation of Bilingual including Dual Language Programs. We cannot let what happened in Windham repeat itself. It's time that we have a bureau that can help construct a network of supports for our bilingual programs and capitalize on our bilingual capabilities that would help our community of Windham, other communities, and our state to prosper socially and economically.

Thank you.