

**Testimony Regarding**

**H.B. 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools**

**S.B. 378: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force**

**S.B. 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force**

**H.B. 5557: An Act Concerning Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators; S.B. 376: An Act Concerning State Funding for Education**

Rachel Leventhal-Weiner, Ph.D.

Education Committee

March 7, 2016

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Rachel Leventhal-Weiner and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

We believe that our public education system must provide all of the state's children with a first chance at life opportunities. First chances begin early with equitable access to early care and education that is high quality, and it is our duty to ensure access to high quality experiences at every level of schooling. Today, the Education Committee has before it several important bills that bring us closer to establishing a true first chance at life opportunities for every child in our state.

**We support** H.B. 5557: An Act Concerning Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators; S.B. 378: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force; and S.B. 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force.

**We respectfully offer changes to** S.B. 376: An Act Concerning State Funding for Education.

**Finally, we oppose** H.B. 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools.

**Support for H.B. 5557, S.B. 378, S.B. 379, and S.B. 376**

**We support H.B. 5557 because it establishes a wage scale for educators working in state-funded early childhood programs.** Currently, state-funded early childhood programs (i.e. programs including State-funded centers, School Readiness programs and programs that accept Care4Kids subsidies) struggle to meet a state mandate that all qualified staff members must have bachelor's degree in early childhood.<sup>1</sup> It is challenging for these programs to recruit and retain qualified and dedicated staff members because early childhood educators with a bachelor's degree have the option to earn a higher salary teaching in a public school setting. If we want to provide our youngest citizens with access to a high quality early childhood experience in care and in education, we must recognize that compensation is a barrier for many programs to recruit and retain staff, which leads to less quality programs. As a state, we have been working toward the provision of a

high quality early childhood experience for our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Adopting fair compensation is a reasonable next step in this process.

**We support S.B. 378 and S.B. 379 because the work of the High School Graduation Requirements and Minority Recruitment Task Forces** bring our entire public school system closer to two important goals: preparedness for post-secondary college and career opportunities and diversification of our teacher ranks. The High School Graduation Task Force has issued a final statement to the co-chairs of the Education Committee that calls for a re-evaluation of our existing high school graduation requirements. S.B. 378 incorporates the recommendations of the Task Force, recognizing that new requirements must reflect the changing nature of post-secondary employment and education, that we need greater flexibility for students in terms of demonstration of knowledge competency, and that we must think about course content as integrated instead of segmented. S.B. 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force would extend the important work of the Minority Recruitment Task Force and would allow the task force to continue evaluating strategies for recruitment, preparation and retention of minority teacher candidates.

And finally, **we respectfully offer changes to the financing framework to be developed for S.B. 376: An Act Concerning State Funding for Education. We recognize the need to reform the school funding formula and respectfully suggest that the Department of Education include reform of the property tax system as part of its study.** Our state's school funding formula has not been followed in practice for several years. A well-designed education funding formula targets state aid to districts with high costs because of significant educational need and less ability to pay on their own. As the education cost sharing (ECS) formula currently stands, many districts receive more than their entitlement and many districts receive significantly less than their entitlement.<sup>2</sup> Our research indicates that our most under-resourced schools are concentrated in districts with high rates of child poverty.<sup>3</sup> If the state's contribution to public education remains haphazard, we anticipate that the achievement and opportunity gaps between high-resource districts and low-resource districts to grow.

#### **Opposition for H.B. 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools**

We are here to oppose H.B. 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools. Unlike the recommendations in H.B. 5557, S.B. 378 and S.B. 379 that add to the quality of educational experiences in some way from cradle to career, H.B. 5551 places our lowest performing schools at great risk for mismanagement. The approach to school turnaround has been called "somewhat paradoxical" by scholars in that a complete overhaul of a low-performing school involves severing the very connections that students, teachers and parents share.<sup>4</sup> **Research on school turnaround indicates that a complete overhaul of school leadership, teaching and administrative staff often has adverse effects on student achievement.**<sup>5</sup> These rapid changes to the day-to-day life of school children in low-income districts have long lasting consequences.<sup>6</sup>

We oppose this bill because Section 1b of H.B. 5551 gives sole discretion of the membership in the turnaround committee to the Commissioner of Education. The turnaround committee decides on the turnaround model for our lowest performing schools. The original language in statute specifies diverse membership for the turnaround committee; **diversity of perspective is a cornerstone of an effective turnaround experience.**

We also have concerns about the language in Section 1d, specifically lines 280-293 that specifies the criteria for the turnaround committee's approval of the turnaround agreement. The bill gives the Commissioner discretion to appoint a "a receiver or any other entity" to operate the school in question. While the language maintains that the State Department of Education will "support the

identification and recruitment of effective turnaround leaders and operators through an annual state review and preapproval process” there is nothing in this bill that specifies who will be on the list of potential individuals or entities, what their qualifications are, and if they are a private or public entity. **Successful school improvement programs, both here and across the country, result from engagement of existing teachers, school leaders and families, from investment in strategies that are relevant to each school community, and from a dedication to improving school climate that in turn impacts student achievement.**<sup>7</sup> Most recently our state’s chief turnaround officer championed successful school turnarounds in New London and Bloomfield, and their success resulted from using local resources not from the imposition of outside authority. The language in this bill implies that a complete outsider may be tapped to lead a school turnaround without sufficient input from teachers or families, a prospect that may undermine student success in light of what we know about school improvement programs.

Finally, while financial incentives are important as a recruitment tool, the long-term success in school turnaround is associated with an investment in the school climate—the subject of another bill before you today. The language in Section 1e specifies that schools in the Commissioner’s Network may financially incentivize service to teachers and administrators. The language also indicates that teachers and administrators coming from in state may return to their sending district after they complete service to the Commissioner’s Network school in question. **Short-term leaders and teachers will not put the students in our lowest performing schools at any further advantage.** Students and their families need consistent and invested teachers and leaders to improve the school climate on the path to improving educational outcomes.

**In conclusion, we urge you to support H.B. 5557, S.B. 378, S.B. 379, and S.B. 376 with recommended changes. Additionally, we urge you to oppose H.B. 5551.**

I thank you for the opportunity to testify and I remain available to answer questions if and when they arise.

Respectfully,  
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<sup>1</sup> See Connecticut General Statute: Chapter 164: Educational Opportunities, Section 10-16p Available at [https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap\\_164.htm](https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_164.htm)

<sup>2</sup> See “Testimony Regarding S.B. 316: An Act Establishing A Minimum Level of Education Funding Under the Education Cost Sharing Formula” Available at [http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/040215\\_approps\\_sb816\\_ecsmin50pct.pdf](http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/040215_approps_sb816_ecsmin50pct.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See “Unequal Schools: Connecticut’s Racial, Socioeconomic, and Geographic Disparities in Kindergarten Class Size and Teaching Experience” Available at <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/unequal-schools-connecticuts-racial-socioeconomic-and-geographic-disparities-kindergart>

<sup>4</sup> Trujillo, T. (2012). The paradoxical logic of school turnarounds: A Catch-22. *Teachers College Record* Available at <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 16797

<sup>5</sup> Trujillo, T. and Renee, M. 2012. “Democratic School Turnarounds.” National Education Policy Center Available at <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED536004>.

<sup>6</sup> Ronfeldt, M, Loeb, S., and Wyckoff, J. 2013. “How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement.” *American Educational Research Journal*. Available at <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/50/1/4>

<sup>7</sup> See Memo to the State Board of Education, December 2, 2015 “Alliance Districts Success: Bloomfield and New London” Available at [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/board/boardmaterials120215/alliance\\_district\\_successes\\_bloomfield\\_and\\_new\\_london.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/board/boardmaterials120215/alliance_district_successes_bloomfield_and_new_london.pdf)