

PA10-076

SB379

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hard work, her patience, her good nature, and I hope we would all wish her luck in her future as she is graduating this year into the challenging job market. So thank you, Samantha.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Good luck to you, Samantha. Thank you for being with us.

And now, we will return to the Calendar. Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 468.

THE CLERK:

On Page 27, Calendar 468, Substitute for Senate Bill Number 379, AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOLS, favorable report of the Committee on Appropriations.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Andrew Fleischmann. You have the floor, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question is acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the

bill. Will you remark? Representative
Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is an important measure that's before us here today, meant to improve governance and operations of our VT school system.

The vocational technical high schools are overseen and run by the State of Connecticut. It is a great magnet school system that we, the state, are responsible for.

On February 1, 2010, before this Legislature had even come into Session, the Education Committee had an informational public hearing to look into how things were operating at that VT system. We uncovered some disturbing facts.

There's a single budget figure that's used for all the VT schools, 20 or 19, depending on how you count it these days, and it's included in the State Department's budget, and when cuts come through, that aggregate number is reduced, and then it's divvied up among the schools, and there is no system comparable to what we see for normal schools where budgeting is from the ground up to see what

the needs are, and then dollars allocated to address those needs.

Moreover, there's been virtually no attention from the State Board of Education to this school system. We discovered sometimes it would be discussed as little as two minutes at a board meeting. The subcommittee overseeing these schools often had no one on it with expertise about the schools, and so what were the results?

A lack of basic materials and supplies at some of these schools, including lack of paper. The buses that had multiple code violations and perhaps shouldn't any longer be on the road.

Students that were not able to do their apprenticeships and therefore fulfill the needs of their programs in their chosen vocation.

I have to comment the leadership shown by my co-chair, Senator Gaffey, in bringing these problems to light and in pushing us toward legislative, a set of actions that will address these concerns.

So in that spirit, Madam Speaker, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO Number 4665. I ask that the Clerk please call and I be given

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permission to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Will the Clerk please call LCO Number 4665, which has already been designated as House, excuse me, Senate Amendment "A."

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 4665, Senate "A," offered by Senators Gaffey and McDonald.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Is there objection? Hearing none, Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the amendment that's now before us essentially expands the Section 1 that we had had in the original bill, and makes it clear that we're going to have a public process when there's consideration of suspension or closing of any of these VT schools, that there will be a public hearing, that there will be a chance for members of the public to make their voices heard, and that there will be at least a 30-day period after such public hearing before

the State Board votes on such a decision, and it will require that the State Board indeed make an affirmative decision on closing or suspending a school to avoid the kind of situation we saw recently where a school was closed with no such action.

In addition, the amendment before us involves the State Board of Education adopting recommendations regarding the definition of regions. We aren't really as clear as we ought to be about what regions are served by which VT schools. This Amendment would address that.

I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question before the Chamber is on adoption of Senate Amendment "A." Will you remark further on Senate Amendment "A?" will you remark further on Senate "A?" Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, a question through you to the proponent.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed, ma'am.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Mr. Chairman, in looking at this particular Amendment, would you say that it reflects on not just the vocational, but also on say the vo-ag schools?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, I believe the amendment before us, like the underlying bill, speaks solely to the vocational technical high schools. Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

I thank the gentleman for his clarifications. We certainly have concerns over, in this past year, what has happened to the postgraduate nursing programs that are run by the State Department of Education as well as the concern for the structure within our vo-ag system where there are also for the aviation school, the aviation mechanic schools as well.

So if we go forward, I think this is an

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excellent model. I'd like to thank the Chairman for his leadership in working with the House and the Senate to be able to find a way to smooth line this process to bring the public in, because these are the children of residents in these communities whose lives absolutely get thrown into dismay when their school is suddenly closed and they don't know where they're going to be going.

So I thank the gentleman for all his work.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, ma'am. Will you care to remark on Senate Amendment "A?" Representative Candelaria.

Will you care to remark further on Senate Amendment Schedule "A?" If not, let me try your minds.

All those in favor please signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

All those opposed, nay. The ayes have it.

The Amendment is adopted.

Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended by Senate "A"? Representative Fleischmann.

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REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO 4613 previously designated Senate Amendment "B." I would ask that the Clerk please call and I be given permission to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

What number?

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

LCO 4613.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you. Will the Clerk please call LCO Number 4613 designated as Senate Amendment Schedule "B."

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 4613, Senate "B," offered by Senators Gaffey, Roraback, et al.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Is there objection? Hearing none, Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the

amendment before us speaks to the part of the bill that addresses the composition of the State Board of Education.

The underlying bill makes sure that we have folks who have experience in manufacturing or one of the trades taught in the VT schools included on the State Board of Ed. This Amendment would say that in addition to that, on or after April 1, 2011, we will also have at least one member who shall have experience in agriculture or be an alumnus or have served as an educator in a regional, agriculture or science and technology education center.

So, I believe it also adds two non-voting student members.

So, Madam Speaker, this amendment quite simply takes a good Bill and makes it better. I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question before the Chamber is on adoption of Senate Amendment Schedule "B." Will you remark further on Senate Amendment "B?"

Representative Miner.

REP. MINER (66th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to rise and thank both the Chair here in the House and the Chair in the Senate along with the Ranking Members for consideration of adding vocational agriculture to the State Board of Education.

I think we all know that annually, the discussions that have focused around vo-ag haven't always been as clear to everybody as some have thought they should be. And so I think that having somebody on the State Board of Education with that interest will provide the kind of knowledge that we think would be important for all of the vo-agricultural schools throughout the state. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on Senate Amendment Schedule "B." Will you care to remark further on "B?"

If not, let me try your minds. All those in favor please signify by saying aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

All those opposed, nay. The ayes have it.

The Amendment is adopted.

Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended by Senate Amendments "A" and "B?"

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to tie things up. We now have a (inaudible) of measure that addresses all of the shortcomings I discussed when I brought up the bill before the House. We will be assured that there's proper maintenance of these schools, that the buses that are used for these students are safe and up to date, and that there's a budget in process that makes sense that works much like the budgeting at our local boards of education.

So I encourage all Members in the Chamber to please join me in supporting the measure before us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Will you care to remark further?
Representative Giuliano, you have the floor, ma'am.
Good afternoon.

REP. GIULIANO (23rd):

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Good afternoon, Madam Speaker, and thank you. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of this bill. I would also like to thank the House Chairman of Education, Representative Fleischmann, for his work on this.

The provisions embraced by this bill will make more transparent and deliberate any time a vocational technical school is being considered for being closed.

It provides for what I consider to be a most important linkage of curriculum and workforce needs. It expands the State Board membership to include expertise in manufacturing, the trades and agriculture, very good marriages and linkages in terms of driving curriculums and driving workforce needs.

These are important reforms, Madam Chairman, Madam Speaker, and I urge the Members' support. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, ma'am. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Linda Schofield, you have the floor,

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ma'am.

REP. SCHOFIELD (16th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. A question for the proponent of the bill, through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed, ma'am.

REP. SCHOFIELD (16th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have a question about Section 4 that has to do with bonding, and I perhaps don't understand how this works, but I'm just wondering why these schools, and I know we all know that these schools need more investment and I'm a big supporter of the vo-tech schools, but I'm wondering why they would be treated differently in the bonding process, or if they are. Obviously Section 4 seems to be treating them differently than any other bond request, unless I'm misunderstanding it.

So if I could ask Representative Fleischmann, through you, Madam Speaker, to just describe what that section does. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, the section that's referred to sets up a system precisely parallel to another system we already have in statute, and that is the system for the agricultural land preservation program bonds, and the way it's set up, it ensures that if the Bond Commission has not been paying attention to the issue for a certain number of years, and in fact there is bonding authority that has been completely unused, then the attention of the Bond Commission is brought back to the issue and that the bonds are used in the ways they were supposed to.

We heard testimony about schools that are literally falling down at this point with rain coming through cracks in roofs, with mildew developing, conditions that are unhealthy for any students in this state.

And what this section does is, by adopting language exactly parallel to that in the agricultural land preservation program bond statute, assures that we will cease seeing those conditions in the future.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

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Representative Schofield.

REP. SCHOFIELD (16th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the gentleman for his answer. I was concerned that we were setting a new precedent, and I feel much better to know that we're not, and I really endorse the idea of making sure that these vo-tech schools get the resources that they need.

Thank you very much.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Candelora.

REP. CANDELORA (86th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a brief comment. I do support all these laudable goals that are in this particular Bill.

I am concerned about Section 4 and what we're setting up structurally with the State Bond Commission. I understand that it is mirrored after some past practice, but I think that it's something we really should be moving away from and not having an automatic trigger of this nature.

I don't have qualms about wanting to allocate these totals, these amounts of money to our

schools. I think that they are in need of funding in particular, but I do have concerns about the way this is done and would think just in the future we should try to avoid this type of structure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Thompson.

REP. THOMPSON (13th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the bill. We are doubly blessed or quadrupally blessed in Manchester. We have a parochial high school, a public high school, a vocational regional technical school and now we also have a special high school on the grounds of Manchester Community Collage.

But for many years I represented the vocational technical school teachers, faculty members in labor relations, so I believe I visited every school and got to know many of the people who work there and had such great admiration for the job they were doing and always responding to the community.

This Bill will enable them to continue to respond to the community, but with new support and new resources. So it's a wonderful educational opportunity for our students, a wonderful asset to our economy, to have these schools.

So I strongly support the bill and urge my colleagues to vote for it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Care to remark further?
Representative Coutu.

REP. COUTU (47th):

Thank you Madam Speaker. Just want to say as an alum of the vocational technical school system, this is a good thing, and I've been there with the school that was about 50 years old and seen it deteriorating. We did our best to keep the school maintained. I think they did a great job in Norwich, and obviously we have a new school and we still have some of the buses that are quite old, and one could definitely question.

We know they've been inspected and at times they're really not up to the standard that we would expect to have students in, so I think it is a good

thing now that we're prioritizing, making sure that they are replaced and repaired.

I also think it's a great idea to make the school board a little bit more diverse, get somebody with an agricultural background on there, which is obviously another part of the trades and agriculture go side by side, and I just want to say, I think this is a good thing that we're doing. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Representative Shawn Johnston of the 51st District. You have the floor, sir.

REP. JOHNSTON (51st):

Thank you, Madam Speaker and good afternoon.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Good afternoon.

REP. JOHNSTON (51st):

In support of the bill, Madam Speaker. A lot of hard work has gone into this bill and it's a good product.

I did want to comment quickly on Section 4. I know a couple other people have commented on that section. I hope at some point in future years, we

the Legislature, actually look at the general maintenance, capital and trade equipment line item, and as opposed to much of it ending up on the bond side of the budget, actually place it into the allocated part of the budget on the appropriated side of the budget.

And I think we, the Legislature, have to acknowledge oftentimes the difficulty of getting these things put on the Bond Commission agenda is because we authorize excessive levels of borrowing even though we know that the Executive Branch only has an ability from a fiscal responsibility standpoint of allowing so much of that bonding to go forward.

So I hope in future years we bring our bond authorization in line to the actual capacity of the state and that we consider improving these line items in the budget so that some point in time we're not actually borrowing for these expenses. There's no reason why we can't have a reasonable line item in the budget going forward, which would save us interest costs on this.

But again, I wanted to thank the proponents of this bill. I know they had some great public

hearings, and this is incredibly supportive of the vo-tech system, which is, quite frankly, some of the best money we spend as a state educationally. We get a great bang for our dollar.

And it is an incredible economic development tool for the State of Connecticut, that system, and this certainly helps our vo-tech system. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Representative Leone.

REP. LEONE (148th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of this bill, and the reason why I do so is not only for all the good work that has been done, and I want to commend and congratulate the Chairman of the Education Committee, as well as upstairs in the other Chamber as well for the great work that they did for the language that they put in place in regards to how a technical school would be closed if so it does require to be closed.

And as I'm looking at the language, and I just wanted to read very briefly, in order to suspend or close a school it has to be a comprehensive plan,

Madam Speaker, a seven point plan, an explanation of the reasons for the school closure or suspension, including a cost benefit analysis.

You would think that it shouldn't need to be put into statutory language. The length of a school closure or suspension, a financial plan for the school during the closure or suspension, allowing a public hearing.

Most importantly, making sure the State Board of Education has a vote and does vote on whether to close or not close a school and indicate their reasons why.

Again, Madam Speaker, these are things that should not have to be in statute, and last year we fought diligently to try and retain one of our schools, (inaudible) technical schools from closing, and we fought for these types of measures, and we weren't able to have that done in time, and as a result, a school was forced to close.

So I'm very happy to see this. What happened to us in our community won't happen in anyone else's community, and it never should have come to that.

And so I do applaud the Chair and this

Legislature for passing this, for hopefully passing this bill, for voting for it, to make sure that things like that never occur again, because quite frankly, it never should have happened in the first place. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Representative Noujaim.

REP. NOUJAIM (74th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good afternoon to you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Good afternoon to you, sir.

REP. NOUJAIM (74th):

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of this bill. Normally, I would not want to speak just for the sake of saying something, but in this specific incident, Madam Speaker, I have lots of stakes in this bill, and I have a great deal of stakes as well in the vocational and technical schools.

You see, Madam Speaker, I work for a manufacturing facility, a small family business that started in my mother-in-law's garage. Back then, Madam Speaker, I started visiting (inaudible)

Vocational Technical School in Waterbury and working with the kids, especially in the machine tool program.

And Madam Speaker, I will tell you, the foreman of our shop right now is a graduate of (inaudible) Vocational Technical School.

What I do every year, Madam Speaker is, I got to the school. I spend a great deal of time with them and energy trying to work with the kids and mentor them so that they become an asset to our community, and every year I pick two students from the machine tool program, bring them to our shop, put them on the state apprenticeship program, which is a very great program and I commend our State of Connecticut for doing the apprenticeship program.

So I put those kids on the apprenticeship program. They work part-time for us while they are still going, attending (inaudible) Vocational Technical School, and when they graduate we immediately provide them a full-time job.

So this is an opportunity for us to grow our kids, to support the vocational technical schools, and in Waterbury now we do have a great new school that's just been built. As a matter of fact in the

next couple of weeks there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony where I will be honored to attend it with Governor Rell and the rest of the Waterbury delegation.

So, Madam Speaker, vo tech schools are very important to me because they provide us, the students to grow and work very hard and build our community.

So I truly, truly stand in support of this bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Will you care to remark further? Representative Susan Johnson of the 49th, you have the floor, ma'am.

REP. JOHNSON (49th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in strong support of this bill. As a Representative from the Town of Windham that has a vocational technical school, I'm very, very supportive of making sure that we have the funding that we need to continue the great work that the technical schools do.

They're the original magnet schools, and they're going to be the leaders in the forefront

for our children of the future who are going to be working in the new green energy areas.

So I thank the Chairman for their leadership on this bill and I urge my colleagues to support it.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, ma'am. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Hetherington.

REP. HETHERINGTON (125th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also rise in strong support of this bill, and I congratulate those who have put in a great deal of work.

I think that an important aspect of this is that it recognizes that going forward we have to have a diverse economy. We have to have a lot of opportunities. We have to recognize the value and the participation of those skills and trades that are taught in these vocational schools and that they have a real place in our economy in sustaining the prosperity of Connecticut.

The time has passed when any economy is going to be sustained in America simply by shuffling the papers until the dollars roll out, and I think that

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these are real jobs that are going to be produced. They are necessary jobs to our welfare and they're essential to our economy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Will you care to remark further?

Representative Betty Boukus.

REP. BOUKUS: (22nd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I do not wish to belabor, but when you have a good Bill, you have to stand up and say that our technical schools need all the support that they can get. We have great Chairmen in the Education Department that make sure that they get their due share.

Goodwin Tech is in New Britain, and I am absolutely, absolutely in support of this bill.

Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, ma'am. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark further? If not, staff and guests please come to the well of the House. Members take your seats. The machine will be opened.

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THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber.

Members to the chamber. The House is voting by roll call.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Have all Members voted? Have all Members voted. If all Members have voted please check the board to determine if your vote has been properly cast.

If so, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will take a tally. And will the Clerk please announce the tally. Sc

THE CLERK:

Senate Bill Number 379 as amended by Senate "A" and "B" in concurrence with the Senate.

Total number Voting	146
Necessary for Passage	74
Those voting Yea	146
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	5

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, Mr. Clerk. The bill passes in concurrence with the Senate.

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Mr. President, an additional item to mark as go is on calendar page 40, Calendar 429, Senate Bill 379. If the Clerk might call that item next. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Calling from page 30, 40, Calendar number 429, file number 599, substitute for Senate Bill 379, AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOLS, favorable report of the Committees on Education, Finance, and Appropriations.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

On acceptance and passage will you remark further?

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, late August of last year I received a number of calls

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regarding the problems at the vocational technical high schools in Connecticut. From the early retirement program, incentive program, the system lost quite a few teachers and those positions weren't filled.

We've asked for the Governor to release the money and some of the teachers were filled but they started off in a pretty difficult manner because those teachers were not hired and filled until very late, almost right before school. Same with coaches, and athletic directors, the funds for that.

From that point on we went through the early fall months and I began getting calls regarding the lack of buses to transport shop students to job sites where they could practice their trade. Not too long after that we discovered that many of the buses were in terrible disrepair and weren't being certified by the Department of Motor Vehicles Department because of the fact that they were in that horrible state of disrepair.

Not too soon thereafter, during the fall began getting emails from parents who were concerned that their children were not only not being transported out to job sites but supplies and materials for the trade

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shops were very lacking. There was no electrical wire in the electrical shop, no sand in the masonry shop, et cetera. So as we moved forward and started gathering information, we prepared for a hearing that took place on February 2.

In preparing for that hearing the staff of the Office of Fiscal Analysis and the Office of Legislative Research requested the budgets for the schools at each of the vo-tech schools. And to their amazement their staff found that these schools actually weren't operating with individual budgets. You can imagine the lack of accountability and transparency when the schools aren't operating off of actual adopted budgets. At the hearing on February 2, we discovered a number of other issues.

One subject that was discussed at length was the closing, or I'm sorry, the suspension of operation at Wright Tech in Stamford. And we'll get to that issue a little later in the debate. We also discovered that not only were materials lacking in the trade shops but many classrooms didn't even have paper. The examples of other problems within the schools; mold, asbestos, leaking roofs, poor ventilation, terribly inefficient HVAC and energy systems. The list went on and on.

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What was astonishing, what was most astonishing on February 2 during that hearing, and it was a very lengthy hearing, was the complete lack of knowledge almost of the board member who is the chairperson of the vo-tech subcommittee of the State Board of Education, her complete lack of knowledge of what actually occurring out in the vo-tech schools. Mr. President, the Committee reported out the bill that's before us right now.

What this bill does, Mr. President is it brings some equity and badly needed attention to our vo-tech schools. It corrects a situation where 16 schools, it used to be 17 now it's 16 and one in suspended animation. Where 16 schools, the State's original magnet schools had their needs nearly completely ignored.

I can assure the members of the Senate that if this were any other school system you would have parents calling for people to resign. That's how awful this situation got in the vo-tech schools. Then when you contemplate these are the students that we'll be relying upon for our workforce in the trades. You really shake your head.

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Because there's a lot of talk about workforce development and here is where the actual workforce development takes place every single day. The kids are in school at the vo-tech schools. The teachers are there and the administrators are there.

And speaking of administrators, let me say this, the principals of the vo-tech schools are heroes. They do everything; chief cook and bottle washer and everything in between. They do a lot of work. They work a lot of hours. And they're extremely dedicated people.

Then we had the LPN program suspended or cancelled and at this hearing on February 2 we learned a number of the instructors of the LPN program, all of them I think, had been transferred out to other jobs.

One woman testified who used to be the instructor, head instructor of Kaynor Tech that where she may approximately \$70, \$75,000 a year in her job there, was transferred to a health facility, State health facility where she's now making approximately \$50,000 a year more. So, and she testified she'd rather be back teaching nursing making \$75,000, \$50,000 less than what she's making right now.

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So, it seemed to me a pretty pennywise and pound foolish step to take. Not to mention the fact that we need nurses in this State. And this program was supplying them. Mr. President, the underlying bill will do a lot to correct the situation. First of all, in its capital needs there's a section whereby the State Bond Commission will vote twice a year on unallocated balances that are over and above a \$2 million threshold.

This is not something novel in State statute. We do this in section 3-20F for the preservation of agricultural lands, the same exact language. And we're taking this step only because the capital needs of the State vo-tech schools including the buses have just been ignored for too long.

We will under this bill have the school buses that are either 12 years old or have been in a consistent pattern of disrepair to be taken offline. Because our students that are being transferred to job sites to practice their craft should not have to be in buses that are in such disrepair that it presents a safety issue.

The bill will also call for two new members of the vo-tech, I'm sorry, the State Board of Education,

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who will have experience in manufacturing the trades or be an alum of the vo-tech system. And one of those two will be the chairperson of the vo-tech subcommittee.

The State Board of Education needs to pay far more attention to the vo-tech system. We were also astonished to look at how long they actually spent in their State Board meetings discussing the vo-tech schools. There were a number of meetings where it was a minute and 20 seconds, two minutes and ten seconds, just very little attention whatsoever spent on these high schools, the State's original magnet schools.

The bill will also require that this be a much more transparent and accountable system because we will now require that the budget for the vo-tech system be submitted to the Office of Policy and Management and to the Office of Fiscal Analysis separate from the State Board of Education budget. They will still come under their governance but their budgets will be submitted separately.

Mr. President, that's a description of the underlying bill. Mr. President, if we could just stand at ease for a moment please.

THE CHAIR:

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The Senate will stand at ease.

(At ease.)

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR;

The Senate will come back to order.

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your indulgence. Mr. President, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO number 4665. If the Clerk please will call the amendment and I be allowed time to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Will the Clerk please call the amendment.

THE CLERK:

The Clerk is in possession of LCO 4665, AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOLS. Amendment is offered by Senator Gaffey and Senator McDonald.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gaffey.

THE CLERK:

It shall be designated as Senate Amendment A.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. I move adoption.

THE CHAIR:

On adoption will you remark further?

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, this amendment gets at the issue that I mentioned briefly in my opening remarks on the bill and that is the issue of Wright Tech in Stamford and what occurred with the suspension of operations at Wright Tech in Stamford.

Mr. President, this occurred without giving the students, parents and the community of Stamford an opportunity to have say, to have their day in court over the question of closing their school. They didn't have a public hearing in Stamford. There was an issue of whether the Board was going to vote to do this or not to vote to do this. There was actually a resolution that ultimately was adopted last December that supported the Commissioner's decision to suspend the school's operations.

But the folks in Stamford, most important the students who my friend, Senator McDonald said so

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eloquently, had their dream taken away from them of being able to graduate from a vo-tech school in a particular trade.

They didn't get their opportunity. This amendment would allow that opportunity. This amendment would require that type of hearing to be held in the community that hosts the vo-tech schools, that vo-tech school that was either closed or suspended operations.

And it would require a comprehensive plan for any suspended vo-tech schools for the reopening of that school. And also would require the State Board to make arrangements for the students who attend a vo-tech school to be transported to another vo-tech school where they could take, up their trade, earn their diploma and then go on to either the workforce or higher education.

Mr. President, with that brief explanation, I'd like to yield to my colleague from Stamford, Senator McDonald.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Senator McDonald, do you accept the yield?

SENATOR McDONALD:

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Thank you, Mr. President. Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR:

You may proceed.

SENATOR McDONALD:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, let me first thank Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann for an extraordinary amount of work that they have done on this legislation in general and particularly Senator Gaffey for his dedication and commitment to the vocational technical high school system in the State of Connecticut.

As Senator Gaffey noted, we had a very dark experience in the City of Stamford with respect to Wright Tech. It was dark not only for my constituents but I think it was dark for the State of Connecticut. And it was particularly unflattering to the State Department of Education.

The students of this school, the parents of these children were manipulated and treated badly. In fact, Mr. President, I have never seen a situation where students and their parents had less say in the outcome of their educational opportunities.

Mr. President, this school in particular, Wright Tech has an extraordinary history going back

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generations in the City of Stamford. And when the State Department of Education decided to close that school there was no communication. There was no forewarning.

There was no opportunity to be heard.

Particularly disappointing was the fact that no one from the State Department of Education ever had the good will and good sense to come to the City of Stamford and talk to these parents, to actually stand before a public assembly and explain what they were trying to accomplish or whether they had any rationale to do what they were intending to do.

Instead, Mr. President, the Commissioner of Education took it upon himself to unilaterally close a school in the State of Connecticut. We found no support in State law for doing so. The best we found was a State statute that said that the Commissioner could operate and maintain the schools in accordance with policies and procedures adopted by the State Board of Education.

And let me be clear there is no policy, there is no procedure that allows one individual in the State of Connecticut to unilaterally close a school. But that's what happened. Never did the Commissioner go

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to the City of Stamford. Never did the Superintendent of the technical high school system ever go to the City of Stamford. Never did a Board of Education member ever have a hearing in the City of Stamford. We got most of our information not from the administration but from our local newspaper. No hearing. No vote. No input.

When we wanted to find out what happened we actually had to file a Freedom of Information request to find out what happened. And what we found out was that the Department had made a clandestine decision to close the school and knowing that there would be backlash, an email said we've got to figure out a way to cushion the blow. So we'll say the school wasn't closed. It's operations were suspended. That was a copout.

In my estimation it did a disservice to the State, to the Department, and most importantly to the people of the City of Stamford and the students served by that school. But I have to say, Mr. President, there was no plan. There was no idea how to deal with the students of that school.

So under this amendment, and I have to thank Senator Gaffey again for his help and assistance on

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it, there would have to be a plan. There would have to be a vision. There would have to be a vote. We actually had students who were going to be seniors in that school who were told we may have a slot for you in another city. And some of them now get on buses at 5:30 in the morning on their bus trip to Danbury so they can fulfill their dream.

Surprisingly, those are the lucky students. Those are the students that still have a vocational technical opportunity ahead of them. There were a whole class of incoming freshmen who had been accepted, had received their letters and were looking forward to that opportunity.

And when the Commissioner took it upon himself to suspend the operations of that school they actually received letters revoking their acceptance. And they were told there is no place for you in our vocational technical system. Sorry for your troubles. Go find your education somewhere else.

Mr. President, this was a sad period of time. Uncomfortable for the Department, uncomfortable for the constituents I represent. And in the public hearing when we talked about this I asked the Commissioner of Education if he was proud of the way

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this system or this process unfolded. And to his credit, he said no, the Department had not cloaked itself in honor. I would have to agree with him.

Under this amendment, Mr. President, this experience would not be replicated. Under this amendment the Department would actually have to develop a plan. It would actually have to hold a hearing. It would actually have to have a vote. It would actually implement the fundamental aspects of democracy.

I don't know of one public educational system that would ever close a school without having a vote, that would ever close a school without listening to the parents, that would ever close a school without standing in front of people and articulating a reason or a rationale why that school was being closed. And irony of all ironies after it was suspended, the Department said yes, some of your students might be able to go to another location.

Yes, we might have room for you in Milford. We might have room for you in Danbury. But we're going to bill your school district for the privilege of getting up at 5:30 in the morning and traveling to one of those distant locations.

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Under this amendment, Mr. President, that couldn't happen. And the farce, the farce of saying that this was a suspension of operations as opposed to a closure would be ferreted out in this amendment. That under this amendment the State Department of Education and the Board of Education would actually have to renew that farce every six months. That they would actually have to have that public hearing in the community where they suspended the operations and have that vote articulating once more why the State is forgoing its responsibilities.

Mr. President, I hope there is a future for Wright Tech. It's extraordinarily important. There are students, there are trades that desperately need this school.

And Mr. President, as you know, many of your own constituents attended Wright Tech. It was not just a Stamford closure. It was a closure for all of Southwestern Connecticut.

And when you look at the statutes it says that the State is going to have a vocational technical high school system it will be a regional system. And yet we nowhere in our statutes articulate what the regions are. So I asked the Commissioner, where do my

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students go? Where do they seek out their education? And there was no answer. We have a regional technical high school system that is devoid of definition or meaning. So I don't know what happens next year to my eighth graders who are looking to have a technical high school system. And sadly, neither does the State.

We hope, we pray that Wright Tech will reopen somewhere down the line. We don't know. We have a very difficult budget environment but we're planning. And I hope the State will plan as well. And I hope with the passage of this amendment students in Stamford will have a vocational technical high school experience available to them. And I hope what happened to my community never happens to any of yours.

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further? Will you remark further? If not, all those in favor of the amendment please signify by saying aye.

SENATORS:

Aye.

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THE CHAIR:

All those opposed say nay.

The ayes have it. The amendment's adopted.

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the Clerk is in possession of another amendment LCO number 4613. If the Clerk would please call and I be granted leave of the Chamber to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, please call the amendment.

THE CLERK:

LCO 4613, which will be designated Senate Amendment Schedule B as offered by Senator Gaffey of the 13 District et al.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

I move adoption.

THE CHAIR:

On adoption would you remark further?

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Now Mr. President, first of all I want to thank Craig Miner,

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Representative Craig Miner downstairs in the House. I saw him the other day and he had seen my bill and he had asked me, geez, I noticed you put a couple of people on the State Board of Education who have a vocational technical background or manufacturing background and would you consider putting one of the openings that occur next year when terms expire to have one person be someone with an agricultural background or vo-ag alum just as we've done for the vo-tech. And I thought it was a great idea.

We've had the vo-ag students here year in and year out. And I'm sure there are friends of mine around the circle and downstairs who feel that oftentimes these students don't get enough attention. So this amendment will add one of the people, one of the members of the State Board of Education on or after April one of next year will have to have that agricultural background as a requirement for the appointment.

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further?

Senator Kane.

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SENATOR KANE:

Thank you, Mr. President. Good evening.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening, Senator.

SENATOR KANE:

I too rise in favor of this amendment and I want to thank Senator Gaffey for working with both sides of the aisle on this particular amendment. And I also want to thank Representative Craig Miner. We have a gentleman in our district, his name's Bill Davenport who heads up the FFA Program, the Future Farmers of America at Non-newaug High School.

And Senator Gaffey, you're totally right when you say these are wonderful kids who do some amazing things. A lot of these kids go on to study veterinary science, agricultural studies, UConn, Penn State, Texas A&M. I mean I can't say enough about these individuals and each year they come up and they have a lobbying day themselves and you recognize them in their blue jackets and they do a wonderful job. They take public speaking classes as well. And they're just good kids.

So, I want to thank Senator Gaffey,
Representative Miner, the other members who are signed

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onto this amendment. You know I can't say enough about those kids and the programs and to have the agricultural sciences and those studies represented on the Board of Education is very important indeed so I too rise in favor of this amendment. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further?

Senator Roraback.

SENATOR RORABACK:

Thank you, Mr. President. Good evening.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening, Sir.

SENATOR RORABACK:

I too want to add my thanks to Senator Gaffey whose always taken the time to understand the importance of vocational agricultural education given people involved in that particularly subspecialty of education a seat at the table.

And this amendment will give them at long last a formal seat at the table so they're not always at the door with their nose up against the window saying me too, me too, me too. I know that having, giving them a seat at the table will not only benefit them but it

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will benefit the State Board as well because they do have, there are secrets to their success. They're happy to share them.

And this amendment will allow them the opportunity to share them and I'm grateful to Senator Gaffey for his recognition of the importance of the program. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further?

Senator Prague.

SENATOR PRAGUE:

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I rise to support this amendment. We have a vo-ag school in Lebanon. The kids who go there, you know, just so enthusiastic. The program is great. And frequently when you have a student on the Board of Education they can give you insight to what's needed, what changes would be appropriate.

They're out there in the actual real world and they're a real plus when they contribute. So I'm very supportive of putting a young student on the State Board. And in, I know this is not part of the amendment but part of the whole bill. The vo-tech

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system itself is a wonderful system. And perhaps I'll address that after this amendment passes. But this vo-ag program is wonderful and putting a young student on the Board is a real plus.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Prague.

Will you remark further?

Senator Kissel.

SENATOR KISSEL:

Thank you very much, Mr. President. I stand in strong support of the amendment as well. And I'd like to thank Senator Gaffey for bringing it forward. Located in the great town of Suffield, Connecticut we have a wonderful vocational agricultural program. It serves students from throughout north central Connecticut. I have been up there any number of times.

Those young individuals that avail themselves of that program really know their stuff. They know everything about raising animals. In fact a couple of years ago it was almost humorous in the circle when I talked about taking a tour that day and not only did I see snakes and rabbits and all sorts of other kinds of, chickens but there was llamas there and people

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were talking about how to raise them for their coat, alpaca wool and things like that. It was a very exciting tour.

And any number of times those youngsters in their blue coats as Senator Kane so apply put come up here and talk to us, share their experiences and indicate to us how very important that program is. There was a part of me not too long ago where I was hoping my son, Nathaniel would avail himself of that program but he's taken a different direction, a more academic direction as far as his course of studies.

But without a doubt having someone involved in agriculture on the educational system associated there with will be such a tremendous boon. And it really is an area, I know in my neck of the woods, there's an awful lot of jobs associated with agriculture. They don't push themselves out that much to gain visibility but anywhere I go whether it's the town of Somers, Enfield, Suffield, East Granby, Granby, Windsor, Windsor Locks, there is some form of agriculture in all of those municipalities.

And there's people that want to avail themselves of that. And you can go far. And indeed some of my classmates when I was growing up in the town of

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Windsor went on to Cornell which has an absolutely excellent program for agricultural studies. And so, it can be something local where we're trying to preserve our open space. You know what the best way to preserve our open space is allowing dairy farmers and crop farmers and whether they have horses or anything else like that to be able to have some kind of business, to prosper, to thrive.

I know that we set money aside for open space but just allowing those people that are making a living off the land is a wonderful way to do it as well. And indeed having young people excited and invigorated about learning. It's just a really incredible program in Suffield, again serving all the towns that I represent.

And I think having someone affiliated with agriculture on the State Board of Education is absolutely a wonderful, wonderful idea. And again, thanks Senator Gaffey for moving forward with this amendment. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Frantz.

SENATOR FRANTZ:

Thank you, Mr. President.

I think this is a very sensible amendment and although your familiar with my district, I'm familiar with yours, the agriculture that take place there are somewhat limited perhaps only to the pumpkin patch in the backyard in most people's cases.

However, I think this does make a lot of sense to include these two members on the Board of Education. We have to be sensitive to the needs, the educational needs, throughout the entire State of Connecticut and across the broad spectrum of commercial activities. And agriculture, Mr. President, being the oldest commercial activity in the State, I believe. I'm quite surprised that there isn't that component on the Board already.

And it's good to see that this provision is being made. And who knows, you know, things happen so quickly these days. We having a dynamic economy throughout our country and here in New England and specifically here in Connecticut. We don't know what the needs will be two years and three years from now.

Many years ago it usually took 25 to 50 years to move to a new spot in industry or financial services or service businesses in general to understand exactly

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where our commercial activity is going and what the educational needs are in order to be able to provide the talent for those different industries. So we have to not only approve this amendment, we have to remain sensitive to what those needs are going forward. So I stand in favor of this amendment. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further? Will you remark further on Senate Amendment B? I will try your minds. All those in favor please signify by saying aye.

SENATORS:

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

All those opposed nay.

The ayes have it. Senate Amendment A is adopted.

[B]

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. On the bill as amended I know there are a couple of questions that my colleague and Ranking Member on the Education Committee, Senator Caligiuri wants to ask. But before we get to that I just wanted to say that the staff of

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OFA and OLR and LCO worked very hard on this since last fall, accumulating all the information.

The February second hearing I think was one of the best hearings that we've had in my time up here. We found out a real lot of information to help us craft this bill so that the vo-tech students in this State will no longer be the unwanted stepchild at the dinner table.

They will get their just deserve, a quality education with classrooms and school buildings and equipment and supplies that are second to none. This is a major bill for the vocational technical high school system in the State of Connecticut. And in turn, major bill for the workforce development needs of the State of Connecticut. And I just would like to thank everyone who participated in crafting the bill; my House Chair, Andy Fleischmann.

I mentioned Senator Caligiuri, who we work in a very nice bipartisan manner and were able to get a lot of good things done I think because of that. And I think the addition of the vo-ag member on the Board is an excellent addition because I've been troubled as I said before that the vo-ag students from time to time I think, you know, don't get their just deserve

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either. So with that, Mr. President, I'd be glad to yield the floor to Senator Caligiuri who I believe wants to ask me a few questions.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Caligiuri, do you accept the yield?

SENATOR CALIGIURI:

I do, Mr. President. Thank you. And I thank Senator Gaffey. One question for purposes of legislative intent and then one follow up if I may, through you, Mr. President. Just for purposes of legislative intent, through you, Mr. President, section seven of the bill lines 233 through 236 talk about establishing a vocational technical school system as a separate budgeted agency from the Department of Education.

My question, through you, Mr. President, to Senator Gaffey is, is it the intention of the proponent to actually establish a new agency or to do something different with this language? Through you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY: .

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Thank you, Mr. President. And through you to Senator Caligiuri, the intention, Senator Caligiuri is to not create a new State agency. The intention is to have the central office of the vo-tech system submit their budget, their annual budgets separately from the State Department of Education so that that budget is out there on its own.

Everybody can see it. It's open, transparent and we can have accountability to the budget needs of these vocational technical high schools. Through you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Caligiuri.

SENATOR CALIGIURI:

Thank you, Mr. President. And I thank Senator Gaffey for that response. Because I think it was important to clarify that this section is not designed to create an additional bureaucracy or a new department or agency within the State but rather as I understand it, Mr. President, to separate vocational technical school for budgeting purposes so that having done so, it's easier for everyone reviewing these budgets to see exactly what's being done as it relates to these schools and to have as Senator Gaffey

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describes, more transparency and clarity as to what's being done with respect to these schools. And I thought it was important for the record to clarify that.

The second question, through you, Mr. President, relates to lines 188 through 208 of the bill, section four. It has to do with the language that Senator Gaffey referred to earlier as being modeled after 3-20F of the Connecticut General Statutes. As I read this language it's clear but I thought it was worth making even clearer for purposes of the record.

I read the language being added in lines 188 to 208 as not requiring that these bonds be issued but only requiring that the State Bond Commission take up the question of whether to authorize these bonds on a regular basis so that in keeping with the normal course of events, nothing will change the Bond Commission's authority as it relates to issuing these bonds.

All we are saying as a matter policy is that we believe that the State Bond Commission should be looking at this as something for which they may choose to issue bonds on a regular basis but not forcing them to do so. And my question through you, Mr. President,

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to Senator Gaffey is whether that is an accurate reading of this language.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Through you, to Senator Caligiuri, I do believe that is an accurate reading of this language. There has been a difficult challenge, I'll put it, for the vo-tech capital needs to find themselves on the State Bond Commission agenda and I believe that by mimicking the Agricultural Lands Preservation Statute in 320-F that at least there'll be a reminder twice a year to the members of the Bond Commission that we have this, you know, large school system that it's the State school system and they have capital needs that need to be attended to. And I think that that will help the vo-tech system obtain the type of capital bonding they need for those needs in their schools.

Through you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Caligiuri.

SENATOR CALIGIURI:

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Thank you, Mr. President. And I thank Senator Gaffey for that response. And I have no further questions for Senator Gaffey but if I may by way of comment on the bill. Having studied this bill a good deal since we first voted on it in the Education Committee, I have decided to support it. My concern in the Education Committee was the language that we just talked about as it related to the State Bond Commission.

And I will say for purposes of people thinking about it that I think the danger in on an ad hoc basis continuing to step by step by step sort of tell the Bond Commission what they have to take up. Over time if we're not careful as a body we will basically gut the power and authority of the State Bond Commission and the Governor as it relates to making exactly those types of decisions.

But I think as was the case in 2007 with respect to agricultural lands and as is the case today, we are making a judgment as a General Assembly that we believe is a matter of policy that this is something that the Bond Commission has to take a look at because we don't believe we have taken a good enough look at it for purposes of considering whether to issue the

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bonds that have been authorized. And so it requires this member of the Senate and others to make a judgment as to whether the needs are so great in this case that they override the concern that we are chipping away at the authority of the State Bond Commission.

And on balance I've been persuaded that the need to make sure that we are as a State looking at the infrastructure needs of vocational technical schools is great enough given the circumstances that we've been facing in the last few years that I think it merits our support. For those reasons and because there are other good provisions in the bill I will be supporting it.

And I thought given my no vote in the Committee it was important for me to explain how I got to where I was today in deciding to support it. And for that reason I will be supporting it. And I thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further? Will you remark further?

Senator Prague.

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SENATOR PRAGUE:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President about 40 years ago when I was teaching school the vo-tech system was probably the best example of the magnet schools that we have today. But at that time there were all types of programs. There was, you could go there and learn to be an electrician, a plumber, a carpenter.

Some of our best skilled carpenters came from the tech system. You could take culinary arts. It really was just a wonderful opportunity for young people who really, you know, wanted to be a skilled worker. You could be a sheet metal worker. You didn't want to go to college but you wanted a skill and you could make a good living. And then somehow or other in recent years the programs began to disappear. The concern for the tech schools just dissipated.

Clearly as Senator Gaffey said, they lacked money to buy the kind of equipment they needed. You know, they used to have a lot of adult ed programs like the culinary arts. They don't have that anymore. So this bill that's before us is really, I think, going to restore the whole vo-tech system. And I can't tell you how happy I am to be able to vote for that.

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Another thing happened at the beginning of this year that really was sort of disastrous. They had an LPN program in, I think it was 13 of the vo-tech schools. And the LPN program was closed. There were people who, you know, were planning on going into this nursing program.

We desperately need them in our nursing homes and our hospitals. And the rug was pulled out from under them and the programs closed. Well, first of all it was a bad thing for jobs. If we're looking for jobs, jobs, jobs in this State the LPN program certainly offered a lot of young people a job at the end of their training.

We have now restored six of those programs. They will start sometime in the fall and the programs will be located regionally so that they will serve a large area. I'm happy to say that many of us in this chamber worked to restore that program. And it will again offer an opportunity to young people who want to go into healthcare.

At the end of their training they will practically be guaranteed a job. So the vo-tech schools in our educational system are critically important. And I'm glad that Senator Gaffey and the

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others who spoke in support of this realize the importance of those programs and that the system will be restored to what it was. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Boucher.

SENATOR BOUCHER:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise to support the amendment and the bill. But I also rise to broaden the conversation even if it's just for a little while this year but we don't have the time right now to entertain an amendment which I hope I'll be able to work with the Chairmans of this Committee in the future.

Due to some experience I've had in the past as a State Board of Education member and actually for a short time serving on the State Board of Education's vo-technical committee. And it became very apparent to me that those problems that have been underscored today are real. And that is that these schools do not have the kind of natural support system that a local board of education gives its individual schools.

It is very difficult to focus the attention on a large Board that meets not very often on a disparate

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group of schools throughout the State. I did make every attempt to visit several of those schools during the short time I was there. And it was obvious that they don't get the attention, the facilities support, the programmatical support and so on.

And although many on that Committee did try and did have the best interests at heart and business trying to in fact improve some of the equipment they had and so forth. But the bottom line is that we really need to look at a structural change in the system all together.

What I would envision and others may agree or disagree with me but I think these schools should be the purview of the region in which they function and the students come from. And local boards should be comprised of the individuals that have a vested interest in that particular school in that region.

They could advocate for their budget. They know firsthand the local, what they need in the way of facilities, equipment, curriculum, teachers and so on. And that budget should be dispersed accordingly and handled on a local basis. And in that way I think we truly can make them the magnet schools they deserve to be and have the attention that they deserve to get

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because they do some phenomenal work under very difficult circumstances. They have tremendous results with their students.

In fact, in my own husband's family of six children two of them and a father actually attended Kaynor Technical High School in the Waterbury area. They became tool and die makers. Some of them became carpenters. They've made a great career out of that. They had a wonderful, wonderful education. But we need to really focus on this. I think in fact they've been ignored for too long and I think it's the structure does not help in this regard.

There are a lot of good intentions and good people trying to do what's right for these particular schools. But I think by changing the actual structure and how the budgets are determined and bringing them down to the local level would probably be the most beneficial direction we should go in. And I hope that I can get the support and encouragement by my colleagues that this is something that they would look at into the future.

Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

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Senator McLachlan.

SENATOR McLACHLAN:

Thank you, Mr. President. The City of Danbury is the proud home of Henry Abbott Technical School. Henry Abbott Technical School has been in our community I believe since the early 30s. And in the last five years they've gone through a major transformation with a very spectacular facility that has been rehabilitated and new classrooms added. It's really a gem of our community.

I had the distinct pleasure of attending Henry Abbott Technical School's first hall of fame induction ceremony this week. And at that ceremony they honored nine graduates of Henry Abbott Technical School which is really a who's who of the Greater Danbury Area. And now some of those graduates have gone onto national and frankly international fame in some regards in business.

And so Henry Abbott Technical School in Danbury is an important part of our community. It's a success story of the vocational education system in Connecticut. And I want to thank Governor Rell for her support of funding for this facility and thank this General Assembly for the vision to put money into

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the vocational technical school system. It is a priority. When we look at the graduates of this school we see very successful business people here in the State of Connecticut. And generally this is people who go on to success in business but they stay here in our State.

So I'm a strong supporter of the technical school system. And whatever this General Assembly can do to assure its continued success and the continued success of Henry Abbott Technical School in Danbury I applaud those efforts. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further?

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO:

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I rise first to concur with the comments of Senator Boucher that money is not always an answer to a problem and funds are not always the answer to the problem.

In fact, in some cases that exacerbates the problem. I think that we, some schools need X and some of the schools need Y. I think a good part of

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this amendment is that the requirement for agricultural experience is critical to achieving a goal in this area of a positive result. That being said, I think we do need to look at these on a regional basis. I think we do need to come off the 100,000 foot level that we're always at this Capital and somehow regionalize our efforts with these vo-tech schools that are necessary. And I support the vo-tech schools.

My concern is the bonding issue. And I heard Senator McDonald and Senator Gaffey and others talk about the need that these schools have for money. And the fact that the money was not allocated to these schools. I understand that. I appreciate that. I also appreciate that when it isn't or doesn't happen that support results in an unfair education to the kids that we have in the programs and in fact an unfair future aspect of that education institution. I understand that as well.

But all of us or many of us have bonding projects that sit there for different reasons. In the Fairfield area traffic's a big issue. We've got all sorts of bonding projects for train stations and tracks and highways and roads, all of which are

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important and if it doesn't happen it affects economics which affects taxes which affects sales which effects business. You can go on and on and on. You can make a pretty good argument let's say for 60 percent of the stuff on the bonding agenda that are not called that sits there year after year after year, past five years and you can make a good argument that that money should be used.

The problem is is that if you chip away at that and say every time it's not used in a fashion which we as a legislature deem appropriate you're chipping away at that independent authority, if you would. And you're chipping at away at saying that it could hurt other projects arguably.

If something's on the bonding agenda by this legislature we put it in the package. That means twice a year every year until those allocated funds are used it's got to come up. Other projects may never see the light of day and they might be good projects. But they're not going to get the spotlight. Now I did vote in favor of the agricultural land bill that Senator Gaffey talked about.

And I did review that language again after Senator Gaffey informed me. And he's 100 percent

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correct that in fact that language matches this language to a tee. And I voted in favor of that. So that puts me in a little bit of a box because I'm not advocating that perhaps that wasn't the right move. And perhaps that wasn't the right intent.

Now, I could argue that that section was to dovetail with the money that we put away for the recording so that when we bought agricultural lands we also used the money from the recordings that we went up and together that was the pool of money that we were going to use to help buy land and keep it from being developed.

And as a lawyer I've learned to rationalize arguments and that would rationalize that argument. But in fairness I understand that when this legislature decides that something is that important and it gets ignored which is the argument that the proponents are making and that inability to bring that up and enact on that money results in a hardship. I get the advocacy arguments. It's going to be a tough call for me.

I haven't really made up my mind yet and I'm listening to the arguments. But whittling away against the Bond Commission Authority and keep adding

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extra tags to what that Bond Commission's going to do will be a very tough predicament for this legislature because if we put in a bill that said highway repairs in the I-95 corridor to lessen congestion, to reduce traffic accidents, increase businesses, should be looked at twice a year by the bonding agenda.

I think a lot of us would be hard pressed to say that's something we shouldn't do. A lot of us would push the green button. But once again we're back in that predicament. And that's the dilemma I find myself in as this bill presents us today. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Very briefly, just to follow up on Senator Fasano's comments. And Senator Fasano made excellent points I thought. There are competing demands year in and year out for getting on the Bond Commission Agenda.

Schools are important. Highways are important. We have to build prisons in this State. There are

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infrastructure needs that the State has to attend to. We spend an awful lot of money on school construction in this State. We also provide for transportation grants to local public school districts and regional school districts. The difference with this one is that the State of Connecticut owns these schools. The State of Connecticut has the obligation just like we require every other local and regional school district to maintain their buildings and provide an equal educational opportunity.

In fact, there's a constitutional obligation in the State of Connecticut for an equal educational opportunity. And since these are the State's own schools, Senator Looney was talking to me just a little while ago that in some towns where you've had the State of Connecticut step in and provide school construction dollars and the schools have been completely renovated or new schools have been built and the parents might look at that and comment, well gee, right down the street we have the State's own regional vo-tech school and look at the condition of that school.

It's nowhere near the condition of the schools that the State is spending money on in our localities.

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I know each and every one of us want to have schools that are excellent schools. Both the capital aspect of the school, the built with bricks and mortar and certainly what's more important is the curriculum and the teachers that are behind it making it work and the administrators. But the distinction here with the obligation of the State to provide for the capital needs of the schools, the vo-tech schools is that they are the State's schools.

There are no other State schools in our elementary, I'm sorry, in our secondary school system here in the State of Connecticut. And that's where I think that that distinction warrants the State Bond Commission just as we do in the agricultural land section that I referred to earlier and that Senator Fasano commented on, Senator Caligiuri commented on.

That's where I believe it absolutely warrants the Commission twice a year to take a look at voting for the utilization of unallocated bond balances to provide, fill a need for the capital issues, maintenance issues, bus transportation issues that are seriously in need at the vo-tech schools. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

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Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further?

Senator Crisco.

SENATOR CRISCO:

Tank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I just want to commend Senator Gaffey and the other members of the Education Committee for their great work in an issue that has been so deserving for so many years. It isn't important now that we mention, you know, how we got where we are. And where we are is really an embarrassment to the State of Connecticut.

Senator Looney and I share a district where there's an Eli Whitney School. We visited that school and it's an embarrassment. And yet, you talk to the children there, the students, their dedication, their class work, sometimes working with outdated equipment. When you look at sometimes the conditions where they have to open the windows of the school during certain times of the year because the steam radiators still keep functioning for some reason.

And one could go on and on and on about the deplorable conditions and that's my particular opinion. I'm also fortunate to have Emmett O'Brien School in Ansonia. And visiting with these students

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to see the work that they do and what we're not paying attention as a society.

In order for us to have a society that makes us the leader of the world we need all kinds of skills. And the very skills of carpentry, auto mechanics, metal working. They have enhanced the cooking program which is very good. But there's so many skills that we're just not paying attention to. And it's easy to say what the shortcomings are but I think it's more important that we demonstrate, we're taking a positive step to correcting the issues that exist. They should not exist.

To go to the Bonding Commission for simple replacement of doors or replace, you know, a leaking roof just does not work even though it's the DPW, you know responsibility sort of, what you have you. So I just commend all those and I hope that we don't slow down on this trail, that we continue to enhance these facilities which are so vital to the future of our society. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Crisco.

Senator McKinney.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

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Thank you, Mr. President. I did not expect to rise. I don't disagree with anything Senator Crisco said. And I think maybe a larger discussion that we should have, the Governor, I think over a year ago proposed a middle college system which did have some vetting. But we've had extraordinary successes with our community colleges. In my neck of the woods, Norwalk Community College, Housatonic Community College, have done fantastic work.

Senator Duff, you've been a strong supporter of Norwalk Community College and their adoption of Wright Tech in many ways, trying to work with them. And so there may be a better way of trying to make sure the future workforce of Connecticut has the vocational, technical, and agricultural skills necessary using our community colleges.

Some of the disrepair at Emmett O'Brien I'm not familiar with. But I'm sure we're all familiar with the fact that school kids in Bridgeport and other places don't even have textbooks. Equally as embarrassing if not more so I would say. I rose because I'm going to vote for this bill but we're all guilty of things in this building. A couple of years ago in the Bond Commission somebody gave \$50 to

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\$100,000 for a Pop Warner Football Field. Baseball fields. Parks.

So we talk about the Bond Commission not releasing important money for our vocational technical schools yet at the same time 180 legislatures are begging for their goodies and favors out of Bond Commission. When in good times it's all good. But now we're spending more than we should, borrowing more than we should.

And we're all sitting here getting mad that money hasn't been released but we released a bunch of other money which is more embarrassing. It's embarrassing that our vo-tech schools are in disrepair. It's more embarrassing that we gave money for a football field rather than for our vo-tech schools. And we are all, 187 of us, myself included guilty for that as well.

So why don't we share in the blame here as well because I do sense a pointing of fingers rather than an acceptance of universal blame. And I rise in support of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

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Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, speaking in support of the bill. I wanted to commend Senator Gaffey for not only this bill, for his advocacy over the years for the vo-tech schools in our State, that he has always recognized that they are a very significant component of our education system and also preparing people for the job skills they need in order to compete in this increasingly sophisticated economy.

But this bill in particular I think is necessary now because some of our vo-tech schools have fallen behind in terms of their physical plant. In terms of not being allocated needed bond funds for improvement and for equipment.

We need to make sure that the equipment on which people learn and train in the vo-tech schools is in fact up to date, that it will in fact be relevant to the kind of machines that they will be operating when they go out into the workforces. Rather than they work on antiquated equipment a couple of generations behind where they need to be in order to be seen as desirable employees.

In addition to that and perhaps it is as, I think it's exactly true that Senator Gaffey mentioned and

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Senator Crisco pointed out, there is sometimes a disparity between the attention paid to the school construction funds for the public schools and municipalities as opposed to those the State runs itself.

And I know I've heard from a number of constituents of course in the City of New Haven. The City in partnership with the State and the State of course being the senior partner because the State is paying more than 80 percent of the school construction funds in New Haven.

But over a period of about 15 years the total school construction program in New Haven will amount to about \$1.5 billion of which about \$1.2 billion of that will be paid for by the State of Connecticut. New Haven's physical plan for its schools are beautiful. There are beautiful schools that are new. There are other older schools that have been beautifully renovated.

In Hamden we've had a new middle school that was built again with the State as a significant contributor to that. In part that was out of necessity because of the pollution problems on the

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side around the old middle school. A wonderful renovation to Hamden High School.

I would occasionally would get calls from constituents who would say, you know, why is it that the State's own school is so shabby in comparison to the beautiful schools in the City of New Haven or in the Town of Hamden.

And I think that that is what this bill is trying to move toward a solution to that problem, to indicate that there is some urgency about releasing bond funds for this purpose. That the vo-tech schools should not be orphan schools in our State system. They are schools that we should all care about as much as we care about the public schools in our own municipalities that we represent.

And I think that this bill is an important step in that direction. And I think it's something that Senator Gaffey has been pushing for and advocating for for a long time. And I urge passage of the bill. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Looney.

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Will you remark further? Will you remark further? If not, Mr. Clerk will you please announce and receive a roll call vote.

THE CLERK:

An immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Will all Senators please return to the chamber. An immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Will all Senators please return to the chamber.

THE CHAIR:

Have all members voted? Have all members voted? Have all members voted? If all members have voted, would the, check your vote to make sure it's accurate and the Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

The motion's on passage of Senate Bill 379 as amended.

Total number Voting	33
Those voting Yea	33
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	3

THE CHAIR:

The bill passes.

SENATOR LOONEY:

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**EDUCATION
PART 2
318 – 666**

2010

CHAIRMEN: Senator Gaffey
Representative Fleischmann

VICE CHAIRMEN: Senator Fonfara
Representative Reynolds

MEMBERS PRESENT:

SENATORS: Caligiuri, McDonald

REPRESENTATIVES:

Giuliano, Bartlett,
Conway, Cook, Davis,
Genga, Grogins, Hamm,
Heinrich, Hornish, Hwang,
Jarmoc, Johnson, Klarides,
Labriola, LeGeyt, Lesser,
Lewis, Lyddy, McCrory,
Mikutel, Miller, Nafis,
Wood

ROBERT GENUARIO: The State of Connecticut is not suffering from a lack of process or a process problem. The State of Connecticut is suffering from a severe financial problem. And the ramifications of what is going on out there are the results of that financial problem, not any defects in our process. And this is the time when the State needs to maintain maximum flexibility with which it can marshal its assets as opposed to restricting the flexibility of this state to put dollars where they'll -- where they will be put to the best use.

With that regard, let me make a couple of very brief comments about Senate Bill 379. And I'll start with the makeup of the board. And I have to say I'm somewhat happy that this section of the bill is -- is here because it drew my attention to something and I was somewhat surprised about it. And that particular section 2 attempts to do away with the vo-tech advisory council which is made up

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of -- supposed to be made up of 19 representatives of the various industries, and it's suppose to advise the State Board of Ed and replace them with two members on the State Board of Education who have a background in -- in the trades in the subject matter of the vo-tech schools.

My initial reaction to it was you were going to lose something that the 19-member committee would provide more varied input than two members who happened to be selected. I discovered that the advisory committee however has not met in quite a period of time. And my recommendation would be to reconstitute the advisory committee in a manner that is workable and fashionable and to obtain for the State Board of Education the advice and input that they need from a broad represent -- broad group of people representing the various trades and industries and those who will make use of the graduates of our vocational technical schools and employ them.

There are a number of provisions in Senate Bill 379 that deals with bonding. There is a provision that requires automatic placement on the Bond Commission agenda for maintenance for vo-tech schools. And let me just kind of set forth what we see as the facts here. In the decade that just closed, the State of Connecticut has done major rehabs, rebuilds, reconstructions of the following vo-tech schools: The Henry Abbott School, the Howell Cheney School, AI Prince, EC Goodwin, WF Kaynor, Norwich. It has done phase 1 of HC Wilcox and is in the process of a major renovation of phase 2 of HC Wil -- Wilcox. Several -- Eli Whitney and HH Ellis are in the design phases, and we are moving forward as we proceed.

The amount of money that has been spent on these rehabs, actual of money out the door, is \$384 million with another \$60 million expected to go out this fiscal year. So we're talking about \$444 million that has been expended rehabbing the vo-tech schools. Now I am not suggesting to you that there aren't vo-tech schools that are in need of major renovations and major attention, there are. And they are and they will continue to proceed -- we will continue to proceed, and we'll continue to get to those in a normal course.

With regard to looking at it, with regard to all of our school construction, vo-tech students make up 1.7 percent of our public school population, but we have spent in the last decade about 8.4 percent of our school construction money on vo-tech schools. Now admittedly that's not a completely fair comparison because non-vo-tech schools can get money from the municipalities as well, and this is the only source for vo-tech schools. But even if you cut that in half, the ratios are not bad as compared to -- as compared to traditional public schools.

With regard to maintenance money the State of Connecticut moved \$4 million in Fiscal Year 5; almost \$5 million in Fiscal Year 6; \$10 million in Fiscal Year 7; \$4.7 million in Fiscal Year 8; none in Fiscal Year 9; and we'll move about \$7.3 million by the time Fiscal Year 10 is over, about \$31 and a-half million of the \$32 million authorized by the General Assembly during that period of time. So other than Fiscal Year '09, we have been moving money at a fairly regular clip and at a clip that is consistent with the needs of our systems, and -- consistent with the authorizations that we have received from

General Assembly.

Second issue deals with buses. As you all know, most of you are probably aware because the Governor announced it recently. There are -- there will be \$2 million on this month's Bond Commission agenda for new buses. It will buy 40 buses. We don't think that the provisions of the bill that says you'll take all buses that are more than 10 years old out of service by July 1, 2010, is very practical. We may not be able to replace all those buses that quickly. If we have to take them out of service, there may not be buses to transport. I don't know that all of those buses -- there may be bus -- there's a guy who drives a car that's more than 10 years old. Some of those buses may be in appropriate condition. So I think the bill, as crafted, might well be a little -- little more heavy-handed than is -- is necessary.

The last provision of that bill that I'll comment on says that the -- the vo-tech system will be budgeted as a separate budgeted agency, doesn't seem to be consistent with the other provisions of the bill which do seem to make the State Board of Education -- the State Department of Education the -- the administrators of the vo-tech school system. It's one agency. It should be budgeted as one agency. But more to the point, we are very supportive of anything that makes our budgeting process more transparent.

A lot of people look at -- when the Governor's two-year budget comes out, they look at this document, which is the budget summary. And that's what most people work with, and if you were to look at the education page on the budget summary, you wouldn't see a lot of detail on the vo-tech schools. However, if

rather than looking at the budget summary, look at this document, which the Governor's two-year budget, you would see significantly greater detail about the vo-tech system and how the vo-tech money is spent. So, if for any reason the amount of money -- the detail that is included in this document is insufficient, we certainly can work with you on what -- what to be utilized in terms of our budgetary process.

With regard to House Bill 5020, which is really the Governor's implementer bill, The Governor has made several proposed changes to the budget, obviously, in an effort to bring down the cost of state government. Most of the provisions in that bill implement that, where we've suggested reductions in certain grants or certain areas that's included in that bill. It's pretty self-explanatory. And I won't go into any detail on it, but I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony, and I'd be happy to answer questions if you have any.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I'll just start with a very brief observation, which is, I think there is a difference of views between yourself and your office and this committee regarding what has happened with the technical high schools. We did have a whole public forum which you -- I don't believe were a part of that really brought to light some grave process concerns, as well as budgetary concerns. And I recognize that we're in a fiscal crunch but that does not explain some of the process issues that we heard at this committee that this bill seeks to address.

With that, I don't ever believe in badgering, arguing with people who come before the committee. I'll just share, I think there's a different of views and with that I'll open it up to questions from members of the committee. Chairman Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Thank you, Chairman Fleischmann. Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary --

ROBERT GENUARIO: Senator, nice to see you.

SENATOR GAFFEY: -- it's always nice to see you.

I -- I just want to very briefly echo Chairman Fleischmann's comments. I -- from where I sit in this chair now for 14 years, I believe there is a process problem. I think it's a process problem that goes back to when I first stepped into this chair that the vo-techs are not given adequate resources. They're not given their due. And often time, they are like the forgotten stepchild. I think there was ample evidence of that at the hearing that Chairman Fleischmann referred to.

We did reconstitute the advisory -- or did not reconstitute the advisory board. We chose to put two people on the State Board of Education with business and trade experiences. Quite frankly, after observing this for many years, there just isn't enough input from people, from the trades and that run a business that are very concerned about workforce development and that could, for instance, chair the subcommittee and really have a stake in the game in creating and enhancing our workforce in the State of Connecticut. And, of course, as you mentioned, the advisory council hadn't met for quite some time so it seemed a very logical thing to do.

With regard to the amount of money we spent on school construction, you and I, for years now have spent a lot of time going over school construction and the priority list. And in fact, we had to pass a law that put the vo-tech schools on the priority list so they're treated like every other public school. Now we have 16 vo-tech high schools. And when we look at high school construction project costs, they, right now, are hovering over \$100 million on new construction or renovate as new. On average over \$100 million. So when -- when you talk about the construction work that's been done to date of the \$440 million, in relative perspective for 16 high schools, and the going rate of reconstruction of high schools in the State of Connecticut right now, \$440 million does not seem extraordinary by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, it seems rather low as compared to what's being spent out there as renovate as new for high schools around the State of Connecticut right now.

The other issue I have is on the buses, and I think again relates to a process problem. There's no doubt in looking at the facts now that they're -- they're -- it's absolutely a process problem with the certification of a bus -- buses and the re-registration of the buses and having them done on time and making certain that we have buses in services that are safe for the children that are being transported on them. Now my information from the hearing that I took away, and I believe I heard the Commissioner correctly, was that they've been requesting \$2.7 million for the last three or four years for the buses. So, in light of that, how does the 2 million meet the need when the agency's been asking for 2.7 million for the last couple of years?

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: You know, I believe the \$2 million is consistent with the request of -- that we had gotten for this purpose. I can tell you that the General Assembly for -- not just for buses but for equipment alterations and renovations has authorized \$32 million since 2005 and that at the end of this Bond Commission meeting, we will have moved \$31,576,000.

SENATOR GAFFEY: And what remains, sir?

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: What would remain would be about \$350,000, but -- so we will be moving a significant chunk. All of the school bus money this month as the -- as the Governor has announced, and we will be moving everything that has been authorized.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Do you know --

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: We did not -- and as I indicated, we did not -- the ratio, we did not move money in '09 and -- but the ratio or the pattern was \$4 million in '05; almost \$5 million in '06; \$10 million in '07; \$4.7 million in '08; nothing in '09; and we'll be upwards over \$7 million by the time Fiscal Year '10 is over.

SENATOR GAFFEY: And our staff had told us that there was about \$11 million left over in the maintenance bond funds. Will -- which can include money going to the replacement of buses as I understand it.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: I'll have to sit with your staff and -- and it may be a 3 or 4 million dollar discrepancy.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: I'll sit with your staff on that.

SENATOR GAFFEY: And do you know the specifications for the buses? You probably don't but maybe you do.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: That I would not know.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay. Because I'm concerned about the change of the specifications of the buses, if, in fact, there is a change contemplated.

The vo-tech students, unlike regular public schools students, as you well know, carry an awful lot of tools and equipment when they go out to a job site. And oftentimes because of the fact that -- the seats, for instance, aren't -- aren't constructed of very tough vinyl. The tools quite often tear -- tear the seats so I -- I think there needs to some attention to the specification of the bus to meet the reality of the -- the needs of the students and their equipment that they're bringing on to the bus and going to the job site.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: I think the point's well taken, and I -- and I don't know the specifications of -- of the buses, but I do know that they are different for the vo-tech schools. They need to be different and they are, in fact, different for the vo-tech schools. And, particularly, those buses that are purchased with the view of transporting students from the schools to the job sites or from homes to the job sites that they're -- there are spec -- special specifications. I can't speak to the details, though.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay. But we're not shifting to a

-- more of a van-type of vehicle than -- than a regular school bus as they've been using.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: That I will leave to the Department of Education to explain.

SENATORY GAFFEY: Okay. Well --

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: I know -- I know we're moving the money. I don't know exactly.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Yeah. I'm concerned about that because I -- I had heard a rumor that that possibly they were moving toward a van-type of vehicle that may not be conducive to the needs of the students being transported back and forth to the job site, but if we could just follow up on that.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: Absolutely.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay. And -- and lastly, your observation of the budget setting process, I have to tell you that when the staff from OFA reached out to the State Department of Education and asked for the budgets for each of the schools, and the response was that they don't have individual budgets. We were quite taken back. I can't imagine how a system of 16 high schools doesn't offer a -- on a needs-based budget when the line item scrutinize -- scrutiny of what's needed at each individual school. Because certainly there could be differing needs at each of the schools. A lot of things may be about the same, but they're -- they're certainly could be different needs in their budgets. And that is why we've written this section so that the vo-tech system actually submits the budgets to the OPM, your office, instead of going through the State Department of Education so they stand out by themselves transparent for

scrutiny of anybody who wants to take a look at them, you know, per each school, where are they putting the money, what are they funding.

And I think from any school district, and we demand that of local school districts. So I -- I don't know why we wouldn't want to do that for these 16 vo-tech high schools plus one that's sort of in suspended animation down in the southwest corner, but -- but to have that type of transparency and accountability to look at where the money is going, how is it being spent, and are the needs of the school being met.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: You know, I am going to reach way back into my memory from when I was on the Norwalk Board of Education which is longer ago than I -- I care to remember. And I don't know -- and I don't know that boards of education approve budgets for individual schools. My recollection as to how we did our budgeting was on a global basis. Now that's not to say that there isn't input from individual schools -- that an individual school wouldn't be a part of the discussion to say, well, we have an influx of kindergartners and we need an extra class, et cetera, et cetera. And I'm sure that happens -- that goes on with the State Department of Education and the -- and the vocational technical system.

I think it is different to say is this the budget where you can move some folks from school to school as populations require versus what are the needs of individual schools. And -- and I -- it may well be that there's a way to meet both needs.

SENATOR GAFFEY: I think we're on the same page. I mean --

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: I think you're right.

SENATORY GAFFEY: I think what would happen is that individual schools would submit the budgets to the central office of the -- the VT system to Superintendent Ciccone and then her and her staff would go through those budgets. But at least you had a record or what's submitted and then, ultimately, they submit an aggregate line-item budget to you for your review of what's going to support the system.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: That's correct.

SENATOR GAFFEY: That's it for now, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Representative Jarmoc.

REP. JARMOC: Thank you.

Good afternoon.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: Good afternoon,
Representative Jarmoc, nice to see you.

REP. JARMOC: I just wanted to talk briefly in regard to your testimony or the -- in regard to House Bill 5020.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: Uh-huh.

REP. JARMOC: The Governor -- the Governor's budget recommendations concerning education.

SECRETARY R. GENUARIO: Yes.

information on a bill of concern to her and her constituents, and then yourself. And you -- you would be able to, you know, add your gloss on anything that's said prior.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Great. We thought we were going to present together but that's fine.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: If -- if you would -- if you would like to all present together that's fine, too.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Would you like my statement at this time, sir, or would you like to have the students speak?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I think it would great if the students started off. Introduce themselves and offered in their own words the reasons that they're here and what they wanted to say.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Well, we'll start with two students who come to us from Eli Whitney in Hamden.

MARTHA FIGEROA: Good afternoon. My name is Martha Figeroa. I'm a senior at Eli Whitney. I'm not good with public speaking so I decided to just write something.

When Mr. Anderson told me that he chose me to give -- to give a speech to the legislators, I knew I was the right person for the job, not because I'm president of the senior class or because I was student of the month but because he sees something in me that could captivate your attention. When people mention Eli Whitney, what is the first thing that comes to their mind? Is it the wonderful faculty or the outstanding students? Or the technologies that offer diverse career opportunities?

Even though all that is true and the school offers an admirable education, most of the people that hear it -- the name of Eli Whitney think an ad -- unsatisfactory accommodations and a below average school. While some of these things may be true, we still manage to outperform schools whose resources supri -- sorry -- surpass ours. I believe that a renovation would truly help the negative image that people have of the school and also benefit the staff and students that make up the Eli Whitney family.

One of the things that is truly low in our school is the -- is the school spirit. Most of the students think that it is outlandish to take pride in a school so old and -- and in desperate need of a renovation. I believe that a -- that if the education is top notch why can't the building be as well. Some will say I'm a senior, and the renovation won't benefit me in any way. That is not true, however, I will explain. Imagine in the future, I'm trying to get a job. I would want the emp -- I would want the employer to think positive -- to think positive things when he goes down the education section of my resume. I would -- sorry -- I would not want him to think as Eli Whitney as mediocers school -- mediocre -- sorry..

We believe in this generation -- sorry about that -- we believe in this generation and their capacity to respond to challenges that cripple hope and dignity for throughout this -- the world. Our overall vision at Eli Whitney is to have a respectful learning community, but how can it be respectful if a boy can't use the bathroom with the door -- with the door closed, or how can I reach -- how can I reach that community stand if we don't have a proper field. This -- this goes

hand -- hand by hand with the mission to establish a safe and comprehensive learning environment where everyone is accountable, respectful and committed to the betterment of themselves and those in the community.

Renovation will help this vision that we have, not only will it lift up the school spirit, but it will give Eli Whitney family confidence, redetermination and most importantly focus. I hope that this -- this has not only been words coming out of my mouth to you but passionate and sincere hearsay. Thank you for your time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for that excellent testimony. We appreciate it.

MARTHA FIGEROA: Thank you.

BRIAN AQUINO: How are you doing today?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: We are fine. If you could please offer your name and hometown for the record.

BRIAN AQUINO: Hi, my name is Brian Aquino. I'm a senior at Eli Whitney, and as you know we're in need of a new school.

We live in the 21st century and have a 20th-century building. Eli Whitney is a smart -- Eli Whitney has the knowledge to use the equipment for shops, but if shops have old equipment against the new technology that we wouldn't know how to use because we don't have due to our school. Eli Whitney has the potential and the skills to be one of the top schools in our system. Eli Whitney is a smart school, and it compete -- and it competes against other technical schools knowing they have a higher advantages with equipment,

facility and conditions.

As a senior the new school isn't really going to help me out, but I feel obligated to support people that are coming after me and the possibility of my children, too.

In sports, the new school will help sports out because of the lack of students not participating for -- for the teams in our school because of the equipment -- the old equipment. And I feel that -- that sports will -- will make the school better with spirit and participating and having -- having fun overall as a school. That was it.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Thank you.

The next student -- the next three students are from AI Prince here in Hartford which, of course, is a beautifully renovated school.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Great. And why don't we have them both come up together and sit by set -- side by side. We can have two microphones on them. One can go and then the other.

JEROME MARIANO: Good afternoon. My name is Jerome Mariano. I am a senior at AI Prince Tech in Carpentry.

Should we all present each other at once?

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Why don't you go ahead and give your testimony, and then you can turn over the microphone to your friend and then --

JEROME MARIANO: Thank you. Well, in my theory I believe that being part of a new building, we have seen a lot of change throughout the years, especially, because in the past we didn't always have the new building at our

disposal. We used to have our old school, which wasn't really in good tip-top shape. We had -- in one side of our -- our building it wasn't really brand new, we had the academic wings but it wasn't really comfortable for our -- at our disposal. But now, as the years went by, we have had the pleasure of having the new building for the aca -- academic side and also for the shop side. The new equipment that we have now a day is it shows -- it allows us to have more hands-on experience and also helps us to be able to produce more of the things that we do hands on, such as, in my case as a carpenter, we are able to produce more cabinets, fine detailed little projects and, et cetera. And also with the new building we have a better working environment, and we have seen the change in -- between the students for the respect of the school and it also is more organized.

I believe that the new school has changed the teachers, as well as the students, to be able to show their respect for the new building, which it shows in to how we care for the building. Also we don't have to waste time traveling back and forth to a different technical school, which we used to do back in, I believe, our sophomore year, sophomore and junior year and freshmen year. We used to travel to a different school, and I believe it kind of wasted a little bit of time on our learning experience, but, as the building changed, the students also changed. We got comfortable with our environment, the new equipment, and we progressed a lot more. And it was real, real -- such a pleasure to have this new building. And I believe that the renovations or the construction in the technical high schools is really beneficial for everybody around us in the school and for parents because they feel more comfortable as

well. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

CLIFFORD DEVORE: Hi. My name is Clifford Devore. I'm currently a senior at AI Prince. I'm in the Masonry Shop.

And my testimony today is, first, I'd like to start off by saying thank you guys for the new building because these last three years was not as good as -- because everybody say your high school years are supposed to be the best years of your life, but for me, personally, going to a different school almost every other week, like -- every time I was in shop was just taking times out of my education because it took 20 minutes to get there, 20 minutes to get back. So that's 40 minutes out of my whole -- my whole shop that I could have been doing, building a project or doing something.

Now I've got a new building, I don't have to worry about that. Now you just go to theory -- first, I mean we go to first period then we go to shop and start building a project. And last year, we were supposed to do NOCTIs, which is a test that the masonries do. And we couldn't do that last year because we didn't have enough training because all the lack of time we had because we got there at eight something and leave by eleven -- 11:30 so we could go to lunch at twelve but now we have way more time. And every student in my shop is participating in the NOCTI because we you have enough time and the curriculum is better now, and that's what would like to say.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. And we're glad that you're saved all that time back and forth now. If you -- if you'd like to turn off that microphone.

Any you can turn on yours and offer your name, address and testimony.

CIARA MORALES: Good afternoon. My name is Ciara Morales. I am a senior at AI Prince, and my shop is Information Systems Technology.

Through my time at Prince, I have been able to witness the whole renovation process. Walking into the school the first day freshmen year was very discouraging because, you know, it was a, you know, in shambles, basically. It was just starting the reconstruction process so, you know, you would see people walking in and out with hard hats. And your -- the hallway would be dimmed because they were still working on it, and, you know, it was -- it was not a school to go to. They would say it was the Prince Tech community, but it really didn't feel as warm and as inviting as a lot of people described it to be. And it was really getting a bad perception from outside, you know, oh, why do you go to that school? You know, the academics didn't seem like they were strong, just because of the -- the presentation of the building.

But as the years progressed and we got a new building, a lot of people started taking it more seriously, even the students. The attitudes completely changed, you know, a new building and a new sense of pride. A lot of people would like to come in wearing their uniforms and IDs. We definitely have more school spirit because we have a field now. We're able to have after-school activities because we have the facilities to do so. It's definitely a great -- a great thing to have. It's brought us closer together as a school, and we're just looking forward to more years there.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony. It was no small thing to get AI Prince from the place that it was at to where it is now. There were surprises during the construction process. And we're happy that all of you are getting to enjoy the new school.

Are there other students from the Technical High School System who are here?

If not, Madam Superintendent and Mr. Commissioner, if you could give us your testimony on today's bills.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Thank you, Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann for this opportunity.

I'd like to speak to the bill just briefly and then take your questions. I have a number of concerns about Bill 379, especially, as it relates to the implementation of several of the provisions.

We understand and appreciate the General Assembly's concern for the status of our school and our school system. There are a number of provisions in the bill that are borne out of some misunderstandings, I believe, and I would like to point those out because it is my hope that this proposal will help our struggling school system.

To be clear, there are continuous communications throughout the fiscal year with our schools, and Central Office has numerous opportunities to weigh in on the Department of Education's biennium and midterm budget request. With -- having said that, the struggle, therefore, I think that the school system is facing is less about the budgeting

development process and really more about our ongoing efforts to surmount this crisis that the State is having, which has resulted in numerous budget cuts and a serious lack of access to bonding.

While we have some concerns with the -- the specific bill provisions, there are some provisions in the bill which we wholeheartedly support and some we could support with slight modifications to the proposed language. As the Commissioner -- well, I guess the Commissioner hasn't spoken yet, but --

A VOICE: He will.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: -- thank you.

The proposal to require the State Board of Education's authority to take a formal vote before closing or suspending operations of school, we think is certainly reasonable, as is the proposal to revise the -- composition of the Board to reflect a greater representation of the trades on board membership.

I do support efforts in this bill to improve the safety of our bus fleet by main -- mandating the removal of buses after 10 years of service, but I am concerned that doing so could result in a wasted resources if the buses are still functioning safely. I have concerns about the requirement that would remove the buses from the road without any guarantee that funds would be available to replace those buses.

From our perspective of always trying to reduce costs, operating costs, I support the proposal to allow the technical schools to purchases supplies or contractual services

from local businesses rather than exclusively Department of Administrative Services. As noted in the public forum, I'm very concerned about additional burdens on principals, department heads and teachers to create and manage budget processes as implied in the provision that would require each of our schools to submit a request to DAS for supplies, materials and contractual services for the full school year. That provision could place a huge administrative burden on our schools, and it would be a very difficult operation for them to project 12 months in advance.

I have delineated our specific recommendations for the provisions in the bill in the written testimony that is being submitted. But with all of that being said, I appreciate the focus on Connecticut technical high schools, and I welcome the opportunity to work with the co-Chairs of the Education Committee as well as the Office of Policy and Management to address some of the critical dilemmas that our schools continue to face in this difficult time in the State's history. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Superintendent.

Commissioner, why don't you go ahead and follow, and then we can have questions directed at either or both of you. Thank you.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: That makes good sense. Thank you.

I -- I simply wanted to give you the opportunity to ask both of us questions simultaneously since I'm both representing the Board and the Department on this issue. And we had planned to make a presentation together so I'm here just to comment about the bill and

to say a number of things that I think have already been said to some degree.

But I want to begin with just the general observation about the spirit of this bill, and I think it is the right spirit. The spirit comes from a concern that we have had about the -- the adequacy of our funding for our technical high schools, and I think a recognition that, in fact, these are vital players and vital elements to a comprehensive set of offerings for choice for our students across the state, and I think, as I said earlier, this is one of our -- our real treasures in this state that we need to do everything and that we can preserve.

And so I think that my remarks are offered in -- in thanks really for the support that's evident here. And I think all of us at the Department, as well as the members of -- of Superintendent Ciccone's staff, have appreciated the attention and the, I think, the real support that has been demonstrated thus far for some time.

Having said that, I do think that before you move in the direction to make the structural changes that you are proposing that you think carefully about it. I do think that if you look at what is in place and what is being purported, there's many, many good things about the opportunity to rethink how we're delivering the services and how the State Department of Education intersects with the -- with the public at large. But I don't think it's an accident, in fact, that we are at a point now where we had an advisory council of 19 members that has not met for over 10 years that there's, in part, a breakdown in terms of the overall investment of -- of the widespread cross-sectional support that we need for --

for our technical high schools.

And so my first comment is -- is that I think that it's important, perhaps, to go back to the original framing of this 19-member committee, and rather than creating something brand new entirely, let's look at it from the possibilities of using it in a new way to strengthen the hand on the broad cross-section of people that will support our public schools, and then have this committee more actively engaged with our State Board of Education. This is a structural issue, I think, and I think it is speaking to the issues of finance, and I think, from your prospective, the issues of process. But I would offer the -- the following thought: if we are to bring about the kind of rigorous oversight of the -- of the -- of our technical high schools in the way that I think are reflected in the spirit of this law, I would suggest that, one, you do expand the Board of Education to include new members. I think it's a very good proposal. I do think that it's entirely consistent with the work that the Board has been doing with its own smaller committee of the board but this would give us an opportunity to expand that work with a broader cross-section of members of the State Board of Education. And I do think that the -- the subcommittee of the board -- the standing committee of the board that has done the work in the technical high school would benefit from those new positions.

We have some concerns about when this would happen. What year you would do it, but I do think that it's a very good idea. My thought in -- in the broader sense is that there is a dilemma that -- that is created by the separation of the -- of this budgeting process from the overall fiduciary responsibility of

the Commissioner and of the Board that we could solve if it were entirely feasible to reconstitute this original committee on the one hand, strengthen the hand of the standing committee at the board level that represents the State Board of Education, and build out a whole new way of, I think, reporting back more transparently about the financing that I think has led many of you to feel that -- that this isn't been adequately represented -- communicated to you.

Those are alternatives that I think, from our perspective, I think would allow us to benefit from the -- the best of both -- the worlds of what has been done in our technical high schools in the last several years under the oversight of the Board and acknowledge the fact that we can get stronger and better. I think, however, the creation of something new that is disaggregated from the overall Board of -- State Board of Education and the Commissioner probably will not be as smoothly operational as you might hope.

So with that said, I think the support for the -- the considerations about buses, about the bonding, about the finding of a new way to engage our principals so that their needs are more explained, I think, to the public at large and the budgeting process can all be addressed. I just -- I'm a little hesitant to think that this solution that is offered here will carry it all the way to the level that I think you would hope for which is high quality administration of -- of our schools and wide representation of what the issues are for a board cross-section of people and the public who -- who know and want to be mindful of what's going on -- on our technical high schools.

So that said, we'd like to take your questions and are happy to engage on that.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I just observed briefly. I -- I sense a bit of a disconnect between the perspective of students who have gotten to get an education in a facility that got the kind of upgrade that this General Assembly is pushing for, for lots of facilities and lots of buses, and the understandable statements and caveats that you and Secretary Genuario have offered.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: I fail to see the disconnect. I mean, the issue is we would like to have as much money as you could possibly generate for our schools. There's no disconnect there. I think the issue is that we want to find a way to manage it together, I think, and that's the only disconnect that we have, and we're not that far disconnected from what you're proposing so.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: There tends to be a connection between process and outcomes and if we do separate out the technical high school system from your Department in terms of a budget line item; if we do try and separate out the governance so that we can see what's happening at each school; if we do have budgets built for each school in the way budgets are built for every other school in Connecticut where they start not with how much is allocated and divide it and see what you can do but figure out what you need to do and build upwards from there.

I do believe that that's going to make a

difference and give us more students who have the kind of happy countenance that we saw from the students at AI Prince. That's -- that's all I'm trying to get at. That process and budgetary outcomes, I do believe, are linked.

With that, I'm happy to open things up to questions and Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Now, I'm a little bit confused of the testimony I just heard. And if you forgive me, but it sounds like an avocation of more of the same.

Commissioner, are you in favor of two additional board members?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Yes.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay, good.

Superintendent Ciccone, what is it with the budget processes envisioned under this legislation that you object to?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Well, I guess --

SENATOR GAFFEY: I asked the Superintendent.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Oh, pardon me. Sorry.

SENATOR GAFFEY: That's okay.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: As expressed before, Senator, it's -- it's just the opportunity. We are working with our principals and with our schools. We listen very carefully. And when things rise to a level that are emergency levels, as well, you know, they contact us at Central Office. But in terms of the budget process and building the budgets, we do solicit the schools. We do talk with our

principals. We have our closeout meetings in attempt to gather all that they can project on what their needs will be. We work with our consultants, as well, who go to each of the schools and -- and talk with the members of their -- their expert areas -- their content areas, whether it's trade technologies or academics to build in as much as possible of what the schools will need. So I think we're doing that.

Can we do more? Can we always solicit more? I think we probably can. But I'm always concerned, always worried about our principals, department heads and teachers having to take on more and more and more.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Yeah, but, if I may.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Yes.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Because, again, I said this to Secretary Genuario, I was, quite frankly, amazed that each school doesn't have their own defined line item budget that's submitted to either you or the Commissioner where people could look at it and determine what are the needs of those schools. Besides of the fact that it cries out for a whole new veneer of transparency and, quite frankly, I don't know how -- how there's any accountability when people aren't operating off a budget and making certain that they're meeting the -- the requirements of that budget.

I mean for us, in the legislature, to not be able to be provided what's the budget at Wilcox, what's the budget at Kaynor, what's the budget Whitney, et cetera, et cetera --

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Uh-huh.

SENATORY GAFFEY: -- to see what's going on in these various schools.

I mean, we heard from the students. They did a very good job pointing out there are different needs at Whitney because of its deplorable condition versus Prince because it's brand new.

So for the life of me, I don't know why anyone would oppose the submission of a needs-based budget for each school to a central office so these needs can be met. It sounds like what's going on, because you used the word "emergency" that when emergencies happen.

You know, my perception of it is we're always putting out fires in this system. Constantly, I've heard from principals around the state, and a couple of them testified here last month. It's always a fire drill. And if -- if we don't go to a needs-based budget for each school, submitted to you for your vetting and then if you want to the Commissioner and then to OPM, I have no idea how we can get this system to be proactive as it needs to be so that we're meeting the needs of the administrators, the teachers and most of all the stakeholders, the students in these schools.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: I -- I hope that I didn't misunderstand your question. Each of our schools does submit. As I said, we have a lot of opportunity to talk with them. We give them opportunities. We have the closeouts and all of that. And we prepare what their needs are and that goes into the State Department of Education. When the budgets are allocated, each school does get a budget of \$250,000, approximately. Is it enough? I think not.

SENATOR GAFFEY: But isn't that the very problem

right there. You're doing what my co-Chair articulated. You're taking an aggregate amount --

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Right.

SENATOR GAFFEY: -- and you just dividing it by 16. Whereas one school -- absolutely, you're going to have different schools with different needs based upon the condition of these schools. And that's what we're trying to drive at. And my understanding of the process is somebody from your office, or somebodies from your office, go down to each of the schools in May or June, wherever, and they determine what may be needed at these schools, but there's no formal budget setting process that is done like is done in every other board of education. So we're grappling with that, and we -- I mean, for 14 years, I've seen this problem where the vo-tech schools are just sort of swinging in the wind because there's no defying processes. So I -- I firmly believe there is a process problem here. And that's what we're trying to attack and help you all out in your job because I think that's what is sorely lacking here.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: If I could say it in a slightly different way. I think I agree that the idea that you could build a -- a needs-based budget for each building would be a very good process step that we should exercise publicly so everyone could actually get and understand what the needs are. And I think that what I was suggesting potentially is that as you expand the Board of Education to include this and as you potentially would reconstitute this advisory committee that those are some of the central tasks that have to be done.

I think my only point is that one of the reasons that we're in the pickle we're in about financing is all of the -- the contractual work associated with -- with personnel which is so -- so fundamental to the costs associated with any school are managed within the Department. And I was concerned that if you pull this apart, effectively, you won't get necessarily the integration and management of everything. But I do think that the idea of very clearly defined budgeting, and letting people see is -- is something we can manage. And I was really kind of saying, look, you don't necessarily need to create something new; we could do it with those objectives in mind.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Well, that's a fair point, Commissioner. So -- so maybe we go to a system whereby the schools submit budgets to -- to Superintendent Ciccone, and then Superintendent Ciccone and her people work with your people, but the budget for the 16 schools in the system is still submitted to OPM separate from SDE's budget. I mean, you all could be involved in doing it but as long as it's separate and set out and it's transparent and somebody can easily look at it.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: I have no -- I have no quarrel with that. I think the issue is you don't want to rip the two apart at the level of the data management and the financial systems that hold it together.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Fair -- fair point, fair point.

And Superintendent Ciccone, I heard your -- your comments about the buses. And I think we have a whole maintenance issue within the schools and the fact that based upon our

conversations and what I've look at, there doesn't really seem to be someone who's held accountable to the maint -- maintenance needs of each school. I mean, typically, in a business you'd have an Excel spreadsheet and someone who'd be monitoring that checklist of maintenance needs, you know, month by month to make sure those needs have been checked off, that the ventilation system's been checked, the dust has been removed, et cetera, et cetera, those simple maintenance issues. And I don't see that in your system. And I think that that is sorely needed. And we provided for in the bill when you said about you're worried that the buses won't be replaced. We've actually taken a bond section of statute from the Department of Agriculture on preservation of agricultural lands, where we forced the Bond Commission to vote on your maintenance request, including replacement of buses.

So I hear your concern about the 10-year issue with buses. I -- I kind of doubt you're going to see much more useful life out of a bus beyond a decade, but we certainly have made provision in here so that the resources would be flowing back to the schools by forcing the Bond Commission to vote, which has been sorely lacking in the past.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Well, I appreciate that. I -- I do have a concern about, you know, not having enough of a fleet. As we know that these buses go in very divergent directions. They are carrying kids to sporting events, as well as the production work and certainly field trips.

But I think -- but I think you are right. Our -- as much as we have requested maintenance

funding for a very long time for the buses, that is true. I think that, you know, as our staffs become a little thinner, it is difficult as a priority. Our business managers do chart and follow repairs when things that are made to the buses in terms of invoices and that sort of thing. I don't know whether we're to the stage where we would need to consider some type of a -- of a leasing program or -- or whatever, but I know that the costs are rising, and the amounts that we are getting are, of course, withheld or they're very old and long in the tooth and being asked for so that was my concern.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Do -- do you know, I asked the Secretary this before, have you heard any -- any question asked to you or anybody in your system with regard to specifications of the buses that the Bond Commission is about to provide \$2 million for?

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Yes, I have. In fact, I think I can clarify that for you.

There seems to be an issue circulating that in -- when the Governor made the announcement that we were thinking about purchasing small buses, shuttle buses, or, in fact, airport shuttle buses. That's absolutely untrue. But I can tell you where it came from. Our intention with that amount of money is to purchase, obviously, as many buses as we can which would be of our 24-passenger bus size. Those buses are approximately \$50,000 per bus. Obviously, we are very concerned about costs rising.

And, in the manufacture of the bus, we need to address a couple of issues that are longstanding issues. They've been of concern to the Department of Motor Vehicles, and they

are of concern to us. One is, and you pointed it out very well, Senator, those buses carry children to production work sites. They are not just carrying the kids. They are carrying equipment, supplies, materials. And it, you know, you know what a bus looks like. Obviously, one short stop and the concern is always that things will come right up the center aisle or under seats or whatever. So knowing that and being -- knowing that that's a concern of the Department of Motor Vehicles, as well as ours, we, obviously, have to address with the new manufacturer of buses some way to capture those materials, equipment and supplies.

And in a conversation that our -- a member of my staff had in terms of what would that look like, there was a simple statement made that we need to work with the manufacturing companies to consider what might be built into the buildings to capture those materials, supplies and equipment, something in the middle of the bus, something in the back of the bus. And the statement was made, something on the order of what one might see when they get on an airport shuttle bus. There are compartments to trap luggage and that sort of thing.

SENATOR GAFFEY: I understand.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Obviously, we would need something locked in.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay. And -- and the 40 that would be provided by the \$2 million in bonds that the Bond Commission is poised to adopt, where does that put you as far as need on -- on your buses systemwide?

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Well, we have about 90 buses. As you know, 50 percent of them are -- are in

excess of -- or 10 years or so.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Right.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: And, certainly, we have some that are even older than that. We'd obviously have to address the older ones first. We will still have a need.

SENATOR GAFFEY: So there are still issues remaining.

Commissioner, did I hear you correctly at the February 2nd hearing that we had on this topic? Did the Department request \$2.7 million a year for each of the last four years?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Yes, that's correct.

SENATOR GAFFEY: That's what I thought. That's what I said to the Secretary he seemed to be not recollecting that.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: No, it's 700,000 short.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Okay. Thank you very much both of you for -- for your testimony. I don't know if any other member --

Representative Hamm.

REP. HAMM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Commissioner, I guess my question to you how did the subcommittee go so long without meeting? Is it part of just the way the Board -- the State Board of Ed works? I --

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Well, I don't know the hist -- it was a great question that we all asked, was the is the advisory committee that's being eliminated, we wanted to know what's its

history. And so there was, I think when the bill was issued, we wanted to understand how long it had been since it met. And, actually, it has not met for 12 years. So it has apparently, I think ceased to carry out its function for some time, and I think without commenting about the reasons I think advisory committees are very oftentimes very difficult committees to -- to organize and manage. And I can only speak to -- to one of the parts of the testimony that I'm going to have about our Special Education Advisory Committee. They're hard creatures to -- to make work.

So it has been well over almost 12 years since this has met, and I think my observation about it if -- if we could actually restructure that to consti -- that concept and then integrate it with a new structure on the Board and a new budgetary process, I think we'd have a better mousetrap here.

REP. HAMM: I guess I just raise it because I'm concerned that over time it got diluted for whatever reason and the focus shifted so that no one noticed --

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: I agree.

REP. HAMM: -- when it began to disappear. And --

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: That's right.

REP. HAMM: -- I would want to have some assurance that, you know, we have now focused on vocational technical, but it's going to need the State Board to actually keep the scrutiny on to make sure that the stepchild is no longer a stepchild.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: I think the proposals that are being offered as sort of structural amendments

to -- to the pieces that we have in place will be very helpful to making it happen.

REP. HAMM: Okay. Yes.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: And I do think that, arguably, in the -- in the absence of having of large staff and a tiny co -- subcommittee at the State Board and a fairly established process for many, many years with OPM as the -- as the first level of administration of the budget, lots has not come forward that needs to be explicit. And I think that's the real obvious message that's got to be acknowledged and dealt with.

REP. HAMM: Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Other members of the Committee?

Senator McDonald.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions about section 1 of the bill relating to the closure or suspension of operations of a technical high school.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: I thought you might.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Not surprisingly. And, obviously, my -- my concerns are -- are the result of the suspension of operations, I guess that's what we're (inaudible) at Wright Tech.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: You're a quick learner. I'm -- I'm --

SENATOR MCDONALD: Well, I'm just facilitating this process, but I wanted to explore with you a couple of things.

First of all, have you had the benefit of seeing the Attorney General's opinion that came out on Friday afternoon relating to --

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: No, I have not.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Okay.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: I was --

SENATOR MCDONALD: Then -- then I won't ask you any questions about it.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Okay.

SENATOR MCDONALD: It wouldn't be fair. But I would like you to take a look at that opinion. Members of the Committee have copies, but I will make sure that you get a copy, as well, if you haven't already seen it.

But I wanted to ask you specifically a couple of additional questions about this because this language in section 1 just would require an affirmative vote of the Board.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Right.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Would you support having a public hearing in the community where a proposed closure would take place prior to any such vote?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Yes, I would.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Would you inclu -- would you mind if we included something like that in -- in the legislation?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Sure. I think the one thing I will say about this. This section 1 actually is a good way, I think, to avoid the -- the disconnect that we have had over the actions that I took thinking and still believing that it was within my authority, fiduciary authority, to suspend the operation of the school. I do think this is one way to get to the heart of what has been a very unfortunate communication issue for all of us, but I do think I would support that and, you know, once we're twice a fool pool, we'll -- we'll make a concerted effort not to have this happen. It happened in the heat of battle really as you can imagine over the summer trying to get the budget put together with very little funding and a necessity to -- to make some -- thank you -- some decisions rather quickly.

SENATOR MCDONALD: And we had an opportunity in a different forum to talk about history, and I'm looking forward myself, too. So sometimes actually legislation is borne from bad experiences. And -- and one of the things I'm trying to figure out is how to take the lessons from that bad experience and make sure that we, as a state, learn from it going forward. So -- so you'd be in favor of a public hearing in the district.

Would you be in favor of us including any language in here that would require before any such vote that the State Board of Education include information or alternative plans for the students who were previously served by the school that was being proposed to be closed or suspended?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Well, if you're asking me, I'm not the voting board member here, but I think anything that I think will get to the heart of

the issue about what's at stake with a decision of this magnitude, I would be in support of as Commissioner. I do have to reserve the rights of the Board on -- on this matter, but, yes, I would say so.

SENATOR MCDONALD: And -- and I understand you can't speak for the Board --

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Right.

SENATOR MCDONALD: -- but you're -- you're the person who's been putting in the -- in the seat so I only get to ask you questions.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Okay.

SENATOR MCDONALD: With respect to school transportation dollars that would be needed to be expended by a community if -- let me rephrase that -- if there's a closure of a school, as I understand the current law, the community where that school -- the district where that school exists would be required to pay the transportation costs of that district's students to any alternative technical high school; is that right?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: That's right.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Okay. So -- so if the State Board of Education closes or suspends operations, it falls to the district to pick up the tab for transportation. Would you -- would you agree with me that it -- that any such closure or suspension of operations of a technical high school should result in transportation costs for those students being borne by the State and not the -- not the district?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Well, I think that that line

of reasoning is consistent I would say, yes, it makes sense. I mean, I think if you're going to have a process that votes and systematically moves through a series of decisions that -- that are public and are acknowledged and there are consequences with them that then there's enough time arguably to anticipate the -- the implementation costs associated with a decision like that. And I think that makes sense, yes.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Okay. Now one of the things that concerned me with this situation in Stamford was the lack of what I would consider a cost-benefit analysis for a closure or suspension of operations. If we're going to require a public hearing in the community where that district -- where that school exists prior to any closure or suspension, would you agree or disagree that there should be a -- a strategic plan and cost-benefit analysis undertaken by the State Department of Education and presented to the Board of Education prior to the public hearings so the members of the public would be able to analyze and consider and question the Board about it?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: No question about it.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Okay. And just finally, with respect to the language as I understand it of existing law, we actually say that there can be a statewide system of regional vocational-technical schools, but we nowhere in our statutes to find where the regions are. And, as I understand it, everybody's entitled to participate in a regional technical high school system, but at least in the communications I've had with your Department that's not defined, and, in fact or in theory, any student could apply to any technical high school in the state. Have you thought about

whether that's good policy, bad policy, whether it should be changed, whether we should actually have regions that are assigned to particular schools?

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Well, I'll ask Pat to answer the question along with me.

I think as a matter of policy, I think if people choose to make an application to -- to -- from -- from such remote distances that it is impossible for them really to get because of the transportation costs, then maybe we need to have regions defined in such a way that you can at least have some way of controlling costs.

The other side of the question you're asking is whether there shouldn't be an open choice system that's essentially statewide. I think the dilemma there is is that we would have to then find a way to set up an evaluation system that would allow people to apply multiple places. And I don't know if that's what you have in mind at all, but I think rather I'd prefer the notion of characterizing regions by geography and towns and being explicit about it than not.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Superintendent.

SUPT. P. CICCONE: In terms of the actual admissions process or enrollment process, students can apply to -- to other schools, but they are always advised that this may be a school -- perhaps they're applying to a school that doesn't have a trade that the school in your own region has, but they have a burning passion -- Dad was a auto mechanic and perhaps that school doesn't have auto mechanics -- they may apply to another school. To advise those students that they, you know, in that

circumstance, their district does not transport to that particular region. Oftentimes, we will have families that are so interested in their youngster having an opportunity to participate in a particular trade that may be offered in another school if they assume the responsibility for that -- for their traveling.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Well, let me ask -- let me ask you this, you know, Wright Tech is now suspended in Stamford, and will be for years to come. Where do my constituents apply to a regional technical high school? Can my -- can my constituents apply to Bridgeport, to Danbury, to Meriden, to Hartford? Can they apply anywhere and will they be considered on an equal footing with the students who are traditionally within a closer geographic region?

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Yes, of course, absolutely. But we don't send those schools into Stamford or Norwalk to recruit because of unfair advantage. That if you have many students then the burden of transportation and all that would be what we're finding you -- Stamford has, for example, now, trying to transport students all the way out to Danbury.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Well, and -- and the City of Stamford now has to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to bus children to Danbury. I'm just trying to figure out if we were to -- if this Committee and the Legislature chose to modify the language, are you -- is your testimony that that the State should actually be the ones to pay for the transportation costs of students if they are accepted to a different technical high school as a result of a closure or suspension regardless of where that technical high school is?

SUPT. P. CICCONE: Yeah. Well, that -- that I would have to agree with Superintendent -- excuse me, Commissioner -- who -- who just stated that would seem equitable.

SENATOR MCDONALD: Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. Are there any further questions for the Commissioner or the Superintendent?

If not, thank you for your time. And we -- we have gone passed what is the time reserved for public officials. We really need to alternate now with the public so thank you.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Sure, just one note. I do have written testimony on an array of other bills, and I'd be happy to share them with you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. I think at this point it makes sense for Committee members to review the written testimony --

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And not force you to recapitulate it all.

COMM. M. MCQUILLAN: Thank you so much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I'd also like all members and the public and the Committee to know that the cafeteria will be remaining open until 6:30 tonight. So for those of you who are sitting and getting hungry, you can escape, go to the cafeteria. We'll still be here.

With that our next speaker will be Merrill

Gay, to be followed by Representative Diana Urban.

MERRILL GAY: Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, members of the Committee.

My name is Merrill Gay, and I'm co-chair of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, representing over 40 organizations working together on issues related to early childhood issues.

I'm here today to speak on Raised Bill 380, a bill that would capture the unexpended School Readiness funds and use them to provide professional development to enable teachers in the School Readiness preschools to reach the 2015 BA degree requirement.

The Early Childhood Alliance strongly believes that highly skilled, motivated, caring teachers are one of the most important things that we can do for young children to get them ready for kindergarten.

This bill is one of a number of steps that need to be taken in order to reach the goal of putting a BA teacher in front of every classroom. Attached to my testimony is a printout from the Early Childhood Professional Registry that lets you take a look by town at the current state of the workforce. I will point out to you that there's a wide discrepancy between the programs in the priority school districts and the ones in the competitive school districts. The competitive school districts get a limited grant that generally the school district matches and the -- it's usually a preschool teacher working in a -- a public school. It's different then the priority school districts that get a much

business world or the military or someplace else to make a midcareer change and become school leaders with proper preparations. So I agree with you about this bill. I appreciate your thoughtful well-researched testimony and work behind this bill.

Are there comments or questions from members of the Committee?

Hearing none, thank you.

MARC PORTER MCGEE: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Next up is Jesmin Basanti to be followed by Mary-Ellen Johnson.

JESMIN BASANTI: Good evening, Representative Fleischmann, members of the Committee.

My name is Jesmin Basanti. I'm a staff attorney in education matters for Connecticut Business & Industry Association. I would like to speak to two bills this evening.

First, being Senate Bill 379. CBIA has a large membership base that -- that it is focused in manufacturing and trades and has seen that there's a lack of skilled workers and feel that it is very important to continue supporting our technical school system. We know that these kids rely heavily on local businesses for a lot of their consumables, but they can't always be wondering where those supplies are going to be coming from.

So we really appreciate the Committee's focus and attention to the technical school system and would appreciate any help that the Legislature can give them. Of course, we all understand the fiscal situation the State is in right now so if there's a way to reallocate

HB5421

funds so that they be given the basic necessities like that they need, we would very much be in support of that.

The second bill, I'd like to speak to is House Bill 5421, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS. You just heard on this bill and CBIA is also very supportive of this initiative. We know that educators are one of the top priorities for student success and welcome alternate routes to have professionals who are educated in the workforce be able to bring that to the classroom and, again, support this initiative also.

Thank you for your time, and I'd be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony.

Do I take it from your testimony that having good technical high schools that graduate students who are able to practice trades is part of having a good business climate for Connecticut?

JESMIN BASANTI: Yes, completely.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And speaking as a member of the Appropriations Committee, where we're struggling to find dollars and pennies for anything. If there aren't easily found dollars, some lying around, to put into the technical high schools to get them to the place they ought to be, would you, therefore, be supportive of changes to parts of Connecticut's tax and fee structure in order to make sure that those technical high schools can give the graduates that your businesses need to flourish?

JESMIN BASANTI: Well, it's -- it's a tricky

question because we already know that the cost of doing business is really high in Connecticut. And when we're looking at the tax structure, we've been talking about that for a while. CBIA has been in front of several committees at the legislature to talk about reforming the tax structure and making changes there that would make it easier to do business in this state and more affordable to do business in this state.

So if those are types of changes we're talking about, and if in lieu of making those changes, the business community could be of assistance in helping out these technical schools, then we're definitely supportive of those types of initiatives.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: I'm not sure I completely followed that but what -- what I'm sensing is that you support improving these technical high schools.

JESMIN BASANTI: Yes.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: And you support changes that would allow us to that without hurting the business community.

JESMIN BASANTI. Correct.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: As a small businessman, I appreciate that perspective.

Any other comments or questions from members of the Committee?

If not, thank you for your time.

JESMIN BASANTI: Thank you very much.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Mary-Ellen Johnson to be

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REP. FLEISCHMANN: And how do you find that for yourself, is that -- is that hard, is that easy?

ZEB OKO: Hard.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Yes. I think it's hard for most people.

Are there questions or comments from members of the Committee?

If not, I'd just would like to thank you for coming forward. It's not easy to go ahead and sit in that special chair with a little red light come on and give testimony for anybody, let alone a student who's still in high school, and we really appreciate you taking the time to work with your mom to out together your testimony and come forward so thank you very much.

ZEB OKO: You're welcome.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Rick Tanasi is up next to be followed by Deidre Fitzgerald.

RICK TANASI: Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Committee members, my name is Rick Tanasi. I am president of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers AFT Connecticut Local 4200A.

90379

SVFT represents over 1200 exceptional professionals who teach in the Connecticut technical high school system. Our members have the unique responsibility of providing students with skilled trade and rigorous academic preparation for success in today's global economy.

In his Race to the Top initiative, President

Barak Obama asked us all to reconsider the way we run our schools and, thus, help our students to learn. Though, not everyone may agree on the details of this initiative, we must all applaud its goal. Similarly, to Senate Bill 379, is a much needed attempt to the Connecticut Technical High School to reconsider the way we organize our finances and our programs.

For a hundred years, a vocational-technical school system has produced skilled workers who have greatly added to the economic life of our state. As a graduate of Prince Tech in Hartford, Connecticut, I know how a vocational-technical education creates productive citizens. However, for -- however, for too long the political-financial system in which we operate remain relics of a previous time.

Senate Bill 379 is a necessary step forward to running our system in a more modern and efficient way. Senator Gaffey, in our last opportunity to appear before the Committee, you expressed your frustration that neither the Board of Education or subboard for the CTHSS reacted to the financial crisis that beset us at the start of the year. Both legislation and our teachers became frustrated when we see appointed representatives allowing serious problems in our system to go unaddressed.

Senate Bill 379, subsection (a) addresses the need for two individuals with a trade or technical experiences to be incorporated into the State Board of Education. I believe this will have many positive effects in our future as a educational system.

Looking at the current boards member terms, we

noticed that none are due expiring until 2011 to 2013, with no vacancies, we respectfully ask, how will the changes to this bill occur?

The closing of JM Wright was an obvious example of the problem that we recently have faced. It is our -- not our intention to discuss the needless of suspension of JM Wright. However, the wisdom of section 1, in Senate Bill 379, is self-evident to anyone who has spoken to a student who suddenly has to spend her senior or his senior year 30 miles from their home, or a parent who is excited to see their child develop in an interest in auto mechanics to find out that the opportunity suddenly was ended in June. The provision in Senate Bill 379 should certainly help our system to avoid another unfortunate travesty such as the one that occurred at JM Wright.

Section 3 of the bill is a welcomed recognition of the inefficiencies and political obstacles that we face in trying to make our schools more responsive to the needs of our committee. The committee, such as the one outlined in section 3, will help ensure that the act of responsive -- the advisory committee that could effectively meet the needs of a more open and transparent process.

My only request is that the place be made for an advisory committee to represent either a teacher or an administrator within the schools. When a program's curriculum ceases to respond to the educational needs of our students and the economical needs of our communities, it is first evident that the people in the buildings see this firsthand. A voice on the committee that can discuss the actual practices in the building would well serve the goals and objectives of the advisory committee.

Several other sections, section 3, that discusses the needs of the superintendent to submit information regarding the unemployment status.

As recently as the LPN program, as you know, we ask that with the recent experience of the Department of Education suspending the LPN program while maintaining it is no longer as part of the systems mission statement. It is our -- if our system has submitted information that showed that there is 100 percent job placement rate, the Governor may have known that the success of this program before making her decision.

Lastly, in regards to section 3, which requests our superintendent to publicize the budget, we feel the systems' budget available on the Web could invite criticism and future problems from the public that is uninformed about our system.

As president of the SVFT, I am proud to represent the fine educators who work in our system. Our teachers have been resourceful and selfless as they seek to educate students while over and over being told they must do without. Ultimately, their success must be affected by the materials they are provided, the direction which the system is moving, and the facilities in which they work.

Bill 379 is a necessary move to help our system to provide vocational-technical education to thousands of young people throughout the state. We applaud Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and the whole committee for bringing the goal of education reform to our system.

Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Rick, for your testimony and for your activism on behalf of these schools that so need activism and support.

Are there comments or questions from members of the committee?

Chairman Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Thank you, Chairman Fleischmann.

Thank you very much for your testimony, Rick.

RICK TANASI: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR GAFFEY: You were here the evening of February 2nd, when we held a informational hearing on the vocational-technical system?

RICK TANASI: Yes.

SENATOR GAFFEY: And you heard the testimony that was provided by Beverly Bobroske, who sits as the subcommittee chair --

RICK TANASI: Correct.

SENATOR GAFFEY: -- of the vo-tech system. What was your sense of Ms. Bobroske's knowledge and familiarity with what occurs in that system after you heard her testimony?

RICK TANASI: Well, Senator, with all due respect to Beverly Bobroske and her level of intelligence and the activeness that she has from an extensive background, I was always have been concerned that the lack of really having a real solid understanding of vocational-technical trade bearing schools was

always a concern.

I do know that we did raise that question at our subboard meeting at the very beginning of the school year. I, actually, raised the question out of concern that the lack of materials in idle hands have idle time. There could be disciplined issues. And I was very concerned that without sufficient materials students are going to leave our school system because the school system has done a tremendous job in increasing the student enrollment in our school system, and it was a concern of ours.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Thank you very much, and I would have to concur with you. I was a bit amazed at the responses that she gave to some of the questions. To me, it showed a distinct lack of familiarity with what is actually going on out in the schools. Not having heard the fact that there were supplies not in the shops, not paper in the classroom, the condition of the buses, to me, I found that just to be astoundingly in addition to the fact that at some board meetings they only spent two minutes and thirty seconds talking about the vo-tech system, which is, you know, 16 high schools, the State's original magnate schools.

The other question I wanted to ask you was, I'm sure it must be a great level of frustration from time to time for your members because of the way they -- I won't call it budgeting but -- because of the way they put together the requests each year for what the needs are. And I would suspect that your members would be far in favor of a needs-based budget that was more of a bottom-up approach rather than the top-down model that I see -- I see -- they seem to have been following for all these years. Would you like to comment on

that?

RICK TANASI: I think, as you know, many -- many of our trade instructors are very competent and capable of knowing the costs of material. What I have heard for many years that the main concern was that the budget is not in line with the cost of today's materials. The budget goes back to somewhere in the dates of 1987. And they seem to continually cut the 10 percent or 5 percent each year and try to do more with less, and it becomes very frustrating for -- for our trade people, the teachers.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Well, thank you very much --

RICK TANASI: Thank you.

SENATOR GAFFEY: -- for taking your time to be here tonight and testify on behalf of your members.

And just to answer your question, the additional members of the board as envisioned under this bill, they would have to be appointed after the law was passed or the bill was passed.

RICK TANASI: Okay.

SENATOR GAFFEY: So there'd be two additional members appointed by -- nominated by the Governor who'd have trade technology and business background to sit on that Board of Education. We don't have to wait for anyone to have their term run out to have this done.

Thank you.

RICK TANASI: Thank you. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other comments or questions

SUSAN LOUD: Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening.

My name is Sue Loud, and I am the General Education Department head at Eli Whitney Technical High School.

Earlier this afternoon, you heard from two students at Eli Whitney, and I will now continue where they left off.

The Connecticut Technical High School System has faced a number of challenges over the last several years. Discussion about how best to address these issues is long overdue, and I applaud your efforts to rectify the problems with Senate Bill 379.

As a 13-year veteran of the technical high school system, I have taught at three of our schools and have seen firsthand the disparity that exists within our system. This fall, I returned to Eli Whitney to take on a new position. I transferred from Kaynor Tech in Waterbury, a school which had just undergone an extensive update.

Many of my colleagues asked me how I could leave the palatial conditions at Kaynor to return to Whitney, a school that had not seen any significant renovation since its opening in 1957. As I walked into my office, in August, I looked around at the decrepit furniture and ceiling with tiles that were in the process of falling down, and I started to question my decision. Touring the classrooms and trade technology areas was depressing. The physical plant was old and tired and not worthy of our students and their desire to

learn.

Nevertheless, I knew that Whitney was on the bonding list for a renovation to the tune of \$98 million. Surely, I could hold on for a couple of years. The students had been waiting since 2002 when the amount -- when the money was originally bonded.

Then this past October, State Vocational Federation of Teachers, President Rick Tanasi, noticed that Whitney was no longer on the bonding list. The shock wave that reverberated among the faculty, staff and students of Whitney was intense. Students, their parents and instructors worried about the future of the school, especially wondering if we would be the next Wright Tech. Was our school being neglected because they wanted to close it?

Thankfully, Senate Bill 379 would alleviate some of the stress we are now facing. It not only addresses the closing of schools but would provide funding for much needed maintenance and equipment.

Whitney students come to school every day and see a respectful learning community. Many of our students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and sharing this vision with them is critical for their present and future lives. The Whitney mission seeks to establish a safe and comprehensive learning environment for our students where everyone is accountable, respectful and committed to the betterment of themselves and those in the community.

Early -- earlier this afternoon, the Governor's representative from OPM stated that renovations to Whitney would follow, and I

quote, "A normal course." I would seek a clarification as to what constitutes a "normal course."

In the meantime, it is very difficult to fulfill our mission successfully when the Governor will not release funds approved by the General Assembly to renovate Eli Whitney Technical High School.

Thank you for your time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

If we could move, there and then to the next two gentlemen.

ERIC SAWYER: Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening concerning Connecticut's Vocational Technical High School System and the issues of funding that face our system.

My name is Eric Sawyer. I am the Related Education Department head and a science teacher at Henry Abbott Technical High School in Danbury. I've been a teacher at Abbott Tech for the past 20 years, and I've served in the position of Related Education Department head for the last seven.

As department head at Abbott Tech, I'm responsible for the following areas: science, math, math lab, and art, 12 department teachers, two support service teachers and half the academic education for approximately 675 eager students.

I'm responsible for my teachers meeting the content standards and expected performances

set forth by the State Board of Education. For example, science teachers have 45 expected performances to meet for grades 9 and 10 in preparation for CAPT. These standards, many dealing with scientific inquiry, all have to be met on annual budget of approximately \$300 or -- excuse me -- \$3000 -- feels like \$300. Actually, the \$3000 is not true. The \$3000 is my annual budget for my entire department, math, science, art and math lab -- not just science -- and that's four grades, 9 through 12, not just grades 9 and 10.

In any given year, I can easily spend half of my annual budget on art alone, based on the nature of the discipline and the consumable items. This then leaves me with \$1500 to purchase materials for the remaining subject areas. I'm not even taking into consideration books. If I have to purchase books out of that budget -- if the books are for a -- an elective course. And books on -- today, cost anywhere around 75 to 125 dollars per copy. If I have an elective course that has 15 students at an average of \$100 a book, there's half my annual budget alone. Why should I or any other person in my position, have to make the decision as to who will or will not get the materials they need to better teach our students because of a disgracefully small annual budget?

I am grateful that the Committee has heard our plea and recognized the desperate need for maintenance and equipment funding. I would also ask you to consider language that would also include funding for much needed classroom supplies.

I appreciate and support the Committee's efforts to make the Technical High School System's budget more transparent and

accountable with Senate Bill 379. One would hope that the process will reveal the inadequate funds our system has faced for years as I've described before.

However, I do have reservations about making individual school budgets available online. I feel it could invite criticism from those who are uninformed about our system.

Having been a part of the teaching profession, especially in this system, for the past 20 years, I am well aware of the demands and rewards it has to offer to teachers and students alike. And it's my hope that this bill and its call for a more transparent budget to bring to light the struggles we face for adequate funding.

I thank you for your effort to help our system and for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

ED DESOUSA: Senator Gaffney, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members.

My name is Ed DeSousa, and I am the Masonry Department head at Bullard Havens Technical High School in Bridgeport.

This year our system is celebrating its 100th anniversary. Unfortunately, our purchasing system remains a relic of that time. As the department head, I am oft -- often left waiting well into September for money to be approved so I can buy supplies necessary to begin instruction. Meanwhile, my students cannot receive the education they deserve.

In my testimony to this Committee last month,

I discussed the cumbersome process that forced me to borrow a truck so I could obtain \$60 worth of sand that my students desperately needed to complete the masonry project they were assigned. Obviously, a purchase -- purchasing process that cannot find \$60 for student education is woefully out of date.

The language in SB 379 addresses this problem. To require delivery of material before the start of the school year guarantees that students are not left waiting before the start of the school year. Too often, not only are my students but the students in production shops throughout the system -- are left waiting for supplies that could be purchased with money that has already been approved. The flexibility provided in SB 379 best serves the need of the students in our system.

Every production teacher has a valuable connections within his or her community that can serve the financial needs of the State and the employment prospects of our students. However, we recognize that the superintendents best position to differentiate between the legitimate connections between local business and the ethical demands of state purchasing. We believe that this bill does a good job in reconciling these interests.

As a department head in a production shop, I am greatly affected by the availability of adequate transportation to and from the job site. Too often I have had students, waiting in the shops while production jobs and the unique educational opportunities they afford, sit idle while our buses remain waiting for repair. Section 6 of Senate Bill 379 is a long overdue and much welcome relief to our system. Too often our students are denied educational opportunities that relate directly

to the jobs which they soon will occupy because ancient buses are unsafe. Too often the State denies itself a needed revenue stream because production work cannot be finished while buses sit remain waiting for repair.

While this bill is a much needed and much welcome step in the right direction, I respectfully ask you to consider some changes. The August 15th date for arranging bus inspection does not provide adequate time for the start of the school year. A July 10th inspection date would provide sufficient time to repair the buses, register them, before the students return. Additionally, there is no guarantee that a bus, used as hard as our buses may be used, will last 10 full years. Believe me when I say we value our buses and every step is taken to protect them, however, problems happen. What will the State do when buses break down after eight years? I ask the Committee to consider these scenarios when final -- finalizing the bill.

As a graduate of our system, a business owner and a teacher of 23 years, I understand the good our system can provide to our students and our State when it is allowed to do so. SB 379 is a welcome first step toward moving our system into the 21st century.

I thank Senator Gaffney, Representative Fleischmann and the entire Committee for its foresight, its courage, and its commitment to quality vocational and technical education for the students of Connecticut.

I believe that the benefits of this bill will be felt immediately and well into our future.

Thank you.

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 8, 2010
3:30 P.M.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

Mr. Sylvestre.

JOHN SYLVESTRE: Good evening, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee.

My name is John Sylvestre, and I am the Electrical Department head at Ella T. Grasso Technical High School.

I want to take a moment to applaud the efforts of this Committee to help our system obtain the necessary funding to maintain the buildings and equipment in our schools.

Prior to the Education Committee's forum on the Connecticut Technical High School System last month, many were probably led to believe that the Connecticut Technical High School System was operating smoothly. We thank you for the opportunity to illuminate the conditions in which we and, more importantly, our students, must operate.

The \$2 million in Senate Bill in 379 for maintenance and equipment provided a much needed addition to our system. Teaching at Ella T. Grasso every day makes me wonder if \$2 million is sufficient. Everyday as I drive in, I see a crumbling driveway and wonder about the impression it makes on our parents who drive their school -- their students to school. As I have -- previously testified, every day I see ceiling tiles that have been removed and yet to be replaced. Every day I see desks that have been literally eaten away by termites. Every year we make requests to maintenance, as teachers throughout the systems do, for countless problems. Every

year, maintenance lacks the funds to maintain these buildings.

While the crumbling of many of our facilities is evident to everyone, a much more insidious problem exists. Throughout our system, air quality problems, from mold to PCBs, have been reported.

While our superintendent responsibly moves from crisis to crisis, her actions are little more than a band aid to cover a larger problem. There are buildings in our system that are far older than and far less structurally sound than Ella T. Grasso, but no building can be preserved if there is no money available for necessary repairs or preventative maintenance. The only time money can be found is for maintenance is for emergencies, then emergencies are inevitable. The buildings suffer and the students suffer. Small repairs cannot be made in one year become huge. Expensive repairs that have to be addressed the next. The money allotted for maintenance in SB 379 will help break the cycle of neglect.

Thank you, again, for your attention to these needs of our system.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your testimony and for your teaching.

Are there comments, questions?

Senator Gaffey.

SENATOR GAFFEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank -- thank you all for taking your time to come and testify on behalf of the system that you work for.

I just want to call members attentions to the -- to John's testimony that he handed in. Because you'll see in this testimony the pictures that John Sylvestre has just been talking about, the missing tiles in the ceiling, the incredible amount of dust accumulation, broken heaters, the ductwork that's in disrepair, the paint peeling from the ductwork -- just -- just an amazing set of pictures of the situation in the infrastructure at the building at Grasso Tech.

And this is what we were talking about. And this what the rea -- this is the reason we have this bill because for far too long these folks have had to work in conditions like this. And it's really outrageous. And, hopefully, with this bill, we'll get to the bottom of most of this and address it in a expeditious fashion.

Your comment about the buses -- 10 years old may be too long. We are probably going to add some language in there with regard to persistent disrepair. We have to drill down on the language but in addition to have the 10-year requirement also anything -- any bus that's persistently in disrepair, and we'll talk to the people at Motor Vehicles about that what type of language they might want to put in there to address your concerns, sir, because it is true that -- that bus at seven years and eight years much -- maybe should be taken out of service.

But I want to thank each and every one -- I don't know how you run your program with \$3000. That -- that's just amazing. But you do an awful lot for the kids of Connecticut, and it doesn't go unnoticed by the people sitting back here. We really appreciate it.

Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: It's been brought to the Committee's attention --

Oh, were there any other questions?

I'm sorry. Representative Miller, did have one question for one of the teachers.

Go ahead.

REP. MILLER: I'm sorry:

Mr. Chair, thank you for bringing the testimony to my attention.

I just had the opportunity to look at the pictures, and I'm appalled and embarrassed that we would even ask you to work under these conditions.

And so -- I have one question. I see that there are termites eating away at the table and then there are bugs at the teachers' table. What type of bugs are these? Are they termites? That's basically what I'm asking you.

JOHN SYLVESTRE: Yes, ma'am, they are.

REP. MILLER: So they are termites.

And the corrosion around the window sills, can you just give us an estimate of how long the window sills have been rotting away? I mean --

JOHN SYLVESTRE: I couldn't give you an honest estimate, but there's a barrier, a vapor barrier between window panes. And

typically, you can see through a window. These windows have come to the point where the vacuum that's in between the two windows are no longer there so they have clouded.

REP. MILLER: Well --

Thank you.

And I'm sorry you've got to -- I just -- I'm just amazed that we, as a State, would allow our property to get to this point.

And so I didn't take a tour of Wright Tech but if Wright Tech looked like this, then I guess they should have closed it. But what they should have done was done the work. They should have used the money that was designated to do the work and do it.

So I apologize because I know that I would not want to work under these conditions and please accept our apology.

Thank you.

JOHN SYLVESTRE: Thank you, Representative Miller.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Representative Miller.

And I just want to say I think Representative Miller really spoke for this whole Committee.

Professionals, such as yourselves, students should not be subjected to environments like this.

Thank you for your testimony.

Speaking of students, it's been brought to our attention that there is still a student who is



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**TESTIMONY
SHARON M. PALMER**

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 8, 2010

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for providing this hearing.

I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse 28,000 member AFL-CIO union. I am here today to state our position regarding several bills before you.

I would like today to remark briefly on several bills and put AFT Connecticut on record regarding our positions.

H.B. 5421 An Act Concerning Educators and Administrators – We oppose accepting non-public school teaching for certification. The teaching experiences are not equivalent or comparable.

H.B. 5422 An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes – We support annual charter school reports, not biennial. Charters remain controversial and need close examination and analysis.

H.B. 5424 An Act Permitting Two or More Boards of Education to Jointly Purchase Employee Health Insurance - We conceptually support this bill and look forward to reviewing and commenting on additional proposed language. We would be more than willing to work with you on this issue.

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Kathleen Sanner
Rick Tanasi

HB5425 9B378
9B379 9B380



H.B. 5425 An Act Concerning Special Education – We support the concept of changing the burden of proof to the requesting party. However, we believe legal aid should be available for poor parents.

S.B. 378 An Act Concerning T E A M – We support this bill to ensure a smooth and fair transition to the new T E A M program.

S.B. 379 An Act Concerning Vocational Technical Schools – We applaud the committee's work to improve the Vocational Technical Schools. A special thank you goes to Senator Gaffey. You will hear from several of our members regarding this bill.

S.B. 380 An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education Credentialing – We support this bill and hope there will be funds available for professional development.

Thank you for your time and the hearing opportunity.

P.S. On a personal note, please pass the bonding for Waterford High School.

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Education Committee
March 8, 2010

Testimony of Mark K. McQuillan, Commissioner of Education

ON

Raised Bills 379, 5421, 5425, 5426, 380, 376, 377, and 5422

Raised Bill 379: AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

The Department opposes in part and supports in part the provisions contained in Raised Bill 379, An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools. While the Department understands and appreciates the General Assembly's concern for the technical high school system, the Department feels that many of the provisions in this bill will not address the issues at hand and, in fact, could potentially cause further harm. The Superintendent of the Technical High School System will expand on our position on this bill in her testimony however there are two provisions in the bill that directly impact the State Board of Education which I would like to address.

First, section 1 of this bill prohibits the State Board of Education from closing or suspending operations of any technical high school for more than six months unless a formal vote is taken. The Department firmly believes that I acted within my authority under section 10-95 of the General Statutes when I acted to suspend operations at J.M. Wright Technical High School last summer. However, we understand the General Assembly's desire for a procedural clarification on this issue moving forward and we support this provision of the bill.

Section 2 of the bill requires that two members of the State Board of Education have industrial trade or technical school experience. The Department supports this concept given the important role that the Board plays in overseeing the technical high school system. However, the Department has some concerns about the implementation of this provision given that the Board currently has twelve active members. We recommend that either the proposal be revised to expand the Board membership by two members or that the effective date be pushed back until July 2011, as five members of our Board are up for reappointment in March of 2011.

Raised Bill 5421: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

The Department has concerns with Raised Bill 5421 which seeks to establish an alternate route to certification program for administrators and superintendents as well as to change current law to allow nonpublic school teaching experience to count towards teacher certification.

Section 2: Alternate Route to Certification for Principals and Superintendents

Vocational Technical Schools -**Dear General Assembly,**

I would like to be heard today on behalf of all of the J.M. Wright Tech community. Our children have been neglected. Their futures tossed down and battered before their eyes. The closing of our school was not handled properly, by legal means or moral means. They have been deprived of the education in which they chose to have, in which the State had promised them. They held up their end of their contract, but the State did not! The State closed our school and then voted to close it 4 months later. How can anyone justify this? Is this how we can expect all of our children to be treated? Is this how the State will continue to treat its faculty? These people, these children work hard for what they want. When the rest of the world tossed them aside because they didn't want to fit the mold, we embraced them and told them to break the mold. You told them, "sorry but you have no choice, we're making the choice for you!" My son, did well in Wright Tech once he got acclimated and now in Westhill it is an everyday struggle to keep his grades up.

SB379

I agree with some things in this revised bill – Section 1, sub-section D. While I think it's past time this was entered into law, I think 6 months is too much time for a school to be closed. The children cannot be expected to pass any year with the loss of 6 months worth of classes. I also believe, that the closing of any school should be given a year in advanced, NOT 27 DAYS before the start of school.

Section 2, Sub-Section A – Is also a good thing. We should have 2 industrial, trade or technical school experience and 2 students, one from a technical school. Our voice needs to be heard as well.

We WILL be heard.

Thank you for giving this Testimony consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Thomas

Vice president

PFCO

J.M. Wright Technical School

Chris,

Stamford Representative Andy Sklover wrote me on this morning's public hearing on technical high schools. As a fellow representative of Stamford's 16th district, I ask you please include my testimony on J. M. Wright Technical High School as follows...

9B379

I was very fortunate to have grown up in a family of successful, hardworking tradesmen and had the privilege of meeting many mechanics in various vocations. The common thread most if not all shared was having graduated Wright Tech. The years these businessmen were in attendance at Wright Tech and many years thereafter were fraught with incoming enrollment lists. The diminishing rolls that pursued can only be attributed to the unfortunate stereotype that was allowed to develop regarding students who attended J. M. Wright Technical High School.

There was a time, mine included, when Stamford Public Middle Schools required students to attend industrial arts classes. Although middle school was only a two year stay then, students had two years of woodworking, print shop and metalworking which included mechanical drawing. Today those classes are gone. Why?... Because we made way for the unrelenting pursuit of every student attending college. No doubt an admirable goal in its intent but what resulted was an impressionable typecast left on students who wanted to attend Wright Tech. They became the group who just couldn't cut the mustard.

I know no one will accept fault for this disservice we paid to our children over the years. Nevertheless, it is my personal and heartfelt testimony to what is now the demise of J. M. Wright Technical High School. You will get the argument Stamford's comprehensive high schools also offer shop classes which can prepare a student for the trades. The debate is weak at best. There is no comparison with the curriculum Wright Tech ascribes to where students have alternating weeks of academia and elected trade theory and practice with graduation allowing an apprenticeship status.

A good friend once said "We need computer science professionals but, we also need someone to build the table the computer sits on." The Connecticut State Department of Education must provide guidelines to middle schools giving students a well unbiased choice on moving to a technical high school or high school. While they're at it, they can begin the budget process for restoring industrial arts in middle schools.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Molgano

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Fox, G



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

REPRESENTATIVE GERALD M. FOX
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MEMBER
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*Testimony of Representative Gerald Fox of Stamford
Before the Education Committee on Raised Bill SB 379, An Act Concerning Vocational -
Technical Schools.*

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, I would like to thank you for raising SB 379, AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS.

In this testimony, I would like to specifically address Section 1 (d) of the bill and I would like to thank the chairs for including this section. If enacted it would require the State Board of Education to have an affirmative vote before any regional vocational-technical school is closed or suspended for operations.

As you well know, operations at J.M. Wright Technical school in Stamford were suspended in late July by the Commissioner. This step was unprecedented in our vo-tech system. It was at this time that the many parents, students, teachers and public officials of lower Fairfield County who had worked to keep the school open first received notice of this decision. Students were displaced, and incoming freshman were returned to their respective school districts. The experience has been even more frustrating, however, due to the manner in which the decision to close the school was made. The suspending of the school's operations was never put to a vote before the State Board of Education until months after the decision was made and the school year had commenced.

Numerous questions and attempts to ascertain the procedure by which a school can be closed or suspended have revealed an unclear and confusing process. A written opinion by the Attorney General released last week in response to this situation expressly states that "legislation is necessary to ensure that the process for closing or suspending the operation of a technical school is open and transparent...".

I believe that any decision to close or suspend a vocational-technical school must require an up or down vote by the State Board of Education, after notice and public hearings in the community that will be impacted. As the public officials of lower Fairfield County continue to make our case for reopening of Wright Tech, our goal in the end must be to ensure that decisions around state technical schools are made in a clear and transparent manner, with an input from educators, parents, students and state officials. SB 379 would be a positive step towards that goal.

Thank you very much for this opportunity today and I urge the committee's favorable report.

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
ATTORNEY GENERAL



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Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

**TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 8, 2010**

I appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 379, An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools.

This proposal requires the State Board of Education to take an affirmative vote to close a school by the State Board of Education. The proposal also enhances the role of these schools in ensuring a competitive Connecticut.

Last Friday, I issued the attached opinion, concluding that the General Assembly should adopt legislation to provide for a more transparent and accountable process prior to closing or suspending operations at a vocational-technical school. The opinion found that existing statutory procedures are minimal, and fail to provide adequate opportunity for parents, staff, students and the general public to comment on any decision to close or suspend operations at a school. I also found that parents were unlikely to have been aware of the suspension of operations at the J.M. Wright Technical High School (Wright Tech) until less than one month prior to the beginning of school.

I urge the committee to consider the specific recommendations in the attached opinion to:

1. Provide all stakeholders with an opportunity -- including a public hearing -- to voice their concerns and opinions;
2. Require the state to provide alternative educational opportunities to the school's enrolled students;
3. Require notice of a school closing or suspension of operation several months prior to the beginning of school

Our vocational-technical school students, parents and staff deserve more notice and rights to participate than occurred in the Wright Tech closing. Only through legislation, can interested citizens be given the right to make their voices and views known -- adequate notice and an opportunity to be heard.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of Senate Bill 379 with an amendment incorporating the ideas contained in my legal opinion regarding Wright Tech.

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
ATTORNEY GENERAL



55 Elm Street
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Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

March 5, 2010

The Honorable Donald E. Williams, Jr., Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Martin M. Looney, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Christopher G. Donovan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Denise Merrill, House Majority Leader
General Assembly
State Capitol
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Dear Senator Williams, Senator Looney, Representative Donovan and
Representative Merrill:

This letter responds to your request for a formal opinion regarding the decision by Mark McQuillian, Commissioner of Education ("Commissioner") and the State Board of Education ("State Board") to suspend the operation of J.M. Wright Technical High School ("J.M. Wright") in Stamford, Connecticut. In addition, you ask whether deed restrictions exist on the real property and buildings that comprise J.M. Wright, limiting its use to certain purposes. Finally, you ask whether students who were affected by the suspension of operations of J.M. Wright have any legal recourse.

It is our opinion that the State Board and Commissioner followed the statutory procedure for suspending operations at J.M. Wright Technical High School, but the existing procedural requirements are minimal and do not explicitly describe the opportunity for and weight to be afforded the views and opinions of the public on the potential suspension of operations or closing of any technical school. In this case, it appears probable that the interested public was not actually aware of the school's suspension of operation until the Commissioner announced his decision one month prior to the start of the school year.

Legislation is necessary to ensure that the process for closing or suspending the operation of a technical school is open and transparent and affords all stakeholders a true opportunity - - with prior notice and public hearings - - to voice their concerns and opinions prior to a final decision. Additionally, if a technical school is to be closed or its operations suspended, students should be provided with alternate educational opportunities and sufficient time to make other arrangements.

The Honorable Donald E. Williams, Jr., Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Martin M. Looney, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Christopher G. Donovan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Denise Merrill, House Majority Leader

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Finally, there is a serious question whether the state may use this property for other than educational or charitable purposes. The property conveyed by the city to the state for the J.M. Wright School was park property, already subject to charitable restrictions. While the deed conveying the property from the city to the state is silent as to any restrictions, the city clearly intended the property to be used for educational purposes, and, pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. §§47-2, it is likely the property can only be used for park or educational purposes.

The events which led to your request appear to have begun when the State Board responded to a request for budget reduction options from the Office of Policy and Management. At its December 3, 2008 meeting, the State Board adopted a resolution recommending that, should it be necessary to implement a budget reduction for the technical high schools, such reduction would be made by suspending the operations of J.M. Wright. The State Board acknowledged that doing so would "deprive students in the Stamford area of a promising alternative high school model".

Section §10-95k(b) of the General Statutes requires that the State Board submit a biennial report regarding the status of the technical high school system to the "joint committee of the general assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education." *Id.* On December 10, 2008, the State Board's Connecticut Technical High School Committee adopted the 2009 Biennial report. The 2009 Biennial report includes the plan for the suspension of operations at J.M. Wright as set forth in the State Board's December 3, 2008 resolution. The 2009 Biennial Report was adopted by the State Board itself at its February 4, 2009 meeting and thereafter submitted to the appropriate legislative committee.

When Governor Rell introduced her 2009 budget proposal in February 2009, she included full funding for J.M. Wright. Funding for J.M. Wright also was included in the budget passed by the General Assembly but that budget was vetoed by Governor Rell. When the Governor's July emergency spending plan was released, no funding for J.M. Wright was included. On July 29, 2009, the Commissioner issued a press release announcing that operations at J.M. Wright would be suspended for two years. In addition, the Commissioner sent letters to returning and incoming J.M. Wright students notifying them of the suspension and of their options - - which did not include any plan to place incoming freshmen in other technical schools.

¹ If it becomes impossible to use the property for educational or park purposes, application can be made to the Superior Court for designating an alternate charitable use on the principles of *cy pres*. Duncan v. Higgins, 129 Conn. 136, 140 (1924).

The Honorable Donald E. Williams, Jr., Senate President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Martin M. Looney, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Christopher G. Donovan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Denise Merrill, House Majority Leader
Page 3

Concerned about these matters, Senator Andrew J. McDonald sent a letter to the Commissioner and State Board Chair Allan Taylor asking various questions about the suspension of operations at J.M. Wright. The Commissioner responded, detailing the basis for his suspension of operations at J.M. Wright. In addition, he stated that new students were not offered opportunities at other technical high schools due to the lack of sufficient space to accommodate them. On November 4, 2009, the State Board adopted a resolution which "approved and ratified" the Commissioner's actions.

You have expressed concern that other than the adoption of its December 3, 2008 resolution, no other "official action" was taken by the State Board with regard to the suspension of operations at J.M. Wright. Specifically, you note that there were no subsequent votes by the State Board and no public hearings for parents and students. While such procedures and safeguards would be reasonable and clearly warranted when closure or suspension of operations of a technical school is being considered, the current law does not require or provide for such procedures or safeguards. Instead, a review of the current statutory scheme governing the management and operation of the technical high school system shows that no further action was required by the State Board to suspend operations at J. M. Wright once the State Board adopted and submitted its biennial report on the technical high school system to the General Assembly.

There are no statutory provisions requiring specific votes or public hearings by the State Board prior to suspending the operation of or closing a technical high school.² The only mention in the General Statutes regarding the closure of a technical high school can be found in Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-95k(b).

Section 10-95k(b) requires the State Board to submit a biennial report to the "joint committee of the general assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education." The statute expressly requires the report to "identify each regional vocational-technical school for which enrollment on the preceding October first was less than seventy percent of the enrollment capacity identified in the report pursuant to this section for the prior year." For each such school, the State Board must provide an analysis as to the reasons for the low enrollment, whether there is an expectation that the enrollment will increase or decrease, what options there may be for utilizing unused space, and "a recommendation on the steps to be taken to improve enrollment or of a timetable for closing the school."
Id.

² This is in sharp contrast to the statutory scheme governing regional school systems. Sections 10-63a through 10-63j of the General Statutes set forth a very detailed process that must be followed prior to dissolving an entire regional school district or allowing a participating town to withdraw from a regional school district.

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J.M. Wright's enrollment was less than seventy percent of its enrollment capacity. On December 10, 2008, the State Board's Connecticut Technical High School Committee adopted the 2009 Biennial report which was included on its agenda for that meeting. The 2009 Biennial report includes the proposal for the suspension of operations at J.M. Wright if necessary because of reductions to the Education Department's budget as set forth in the State Board's December 3, 2008 resolution. The 2009 Biennial Report was adopted by the State Board at its February 4, 2009 meeting and thereafter submitted to the appropriate legislative committee.

As part of its analysis of a school with less than seventy percent of enrollment capacity, Section 10-95k(b) requires the State Board to "provide an opportunity for public comment." There is no requirement for notice to students or for public hearings -- only an undefined "opportunity for comment." The Board did provide an opportunity for public comment on J.M. Wright, through the required Freedom of Information Act meeting notices for the December 3, 2008 and February 4, 2009 meetings. Conn. Gen. Stat. §1-225.

No statute requires the State Board or Commissioner to specifically reach out to parents, students, employees or other stakeholders about the possible closing or suspension of operation of a technical school. No public hearings are required to discuss or explain a proposed suspension of operations or closure. Clearly such actions would have been helpful here. Legislation should be considered to specifically define the public's opportunity for input on the suspension of operation or closing of any technical school and to require notice and public hearings for all stakeholders.

Prior to 1993, the State Board had the sole statutory authority to manage and operate the Technical High School System. With the passage of Public Act 93-376, that authority was transferred to the Commissioner so long as he did so in accordance with the policies of the State Board. See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-95(a). In its adoption of its December 3, 2008 resolution and its subsequent adoption and submission of the 2009 Biennial Report to the General Assembly, the State Board articulated that if budget reductions were necessary, the State Board recommended suspension of operations at J.M. Wright as "the least harmful option." Thus, on July 29, 2009 when the Commissioner suspended operation at J. M. Wright, he was acting within the authority granted to him under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-95(a).³

³ The State Board's subsequent November 4, 2009 "ratification" of the Commissioner's actions, simply restates its previous position and neither adds nor detracts from the legality of the Commissioner's actions on July 29, 2009.

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While the Board and the Commissioner's actions were in accord with the law, J.M. Wright's students were suddenly and unexpectedly notified that their school was being suspended immediately, with no accommodation for incoming freshmen to be placed in other technical schools. The suddenness of the closure so close to the start of the school year understandably caused confusion and dismay for students and their parents. We strongly recommend legislation to ensure that technical school students who are displaced by a school suspending operations or closing are given other opportunities to pursue their technical careers. Certainly, adequate time must be allowed for those students to be placed in other technical programs prior to the suspension of operations or closure of any technical high school.⁴

You also asked about the effect of deed restrictions on the real property and buildings encompassing the school. In 1956, the City of Stamford transferred property to the state for the construction and operation of the J.M. Wright Technical School. Although the deed from the city to the state did not place any restrictions on the state's use of the property, we believe that it is likely a court would find that the property may only be used for educational or park purposes.

Generally, deeds, like contracts, are interpreted to determine the intent of the parties based on the express language of the instrument. Parole evidence is not admissible to vary or contradict the terms of a deed, but it is permitted to explain an ambiguity in the instrument. Hare v. McClellan, 234 Conn. 581, 596 (1995). "In arriving at the intent expressed in the language... used, however, it is always admissible to consider the situation of the parties and the circumstances connected with the transaction, and every part of the writing would be considered with the help of that evidence." Id. At 593-594. In this instance, although the conveyance to the state does not contain a limitation on the state's use of the property, the property conveyed by Stamford was part of Woodside Park in Stamford. As such, the property was impressed with a charitable purpose at the time of its transfer to the state. "The uses for which a public park is acquired are continuous and peculiarly exclusive." Driscoll v. New Haven, 75 Conn. 92, 101 (1902). Because the property was impressed with a charitable purpose prior to its

⁴ While Connecticut's education laws require local and regional boards of education to provide all students who reside in their districts with a public education (Conn. Gen. Stat. §§10-186 and 10-220), state law does not mandate that all students have the opportunity to attend technical high schools nor is there any requirement that such schools be established or maintained in any particular town or city. Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-95. This office, therefore, is not aware of any legal recourse available to the students who were displaced by the suspension of operations of J.M. Wright.

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transfer, the intent of the parties to the conveyance is relevant. Hartford v. Maslen, 76 Conn. 599 (1904).

According to Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 47-2: "All estates granted for the maintenance of ... schools of learning, or for any other public or charitable use, shall forever remain to the uses to which they were granted, according to the true intent and meaning of the grantor, and to no other use whatever." The resolutions of the city on the transfer clearly establish Stamford's intent to convey this property for "schools of learning." Further, Section 47-2 does not appear to require this intent to be specifically stated in the language of a deed transferring property for this purpose.

It appears, therefore, that the intent of the transfer of the land to the state was to use it for a technical school. Therefore, it is impressed with a charitable or public purpose requiring that property to be used for educational purposes. If the state is unable to continue to use the property for educational purposes, it must be used for park purposes.

Very truly yours,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
ATTORNEY GENERAL



165 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106-1658

Senate Bill 379
An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools

Education Committee
March 8, 2010

As the agency responsible for the purchase of supplies, materials, equipment and contractual services for state agencies, the Department of Administrative Services ("DAS") offers the following testimony concerning Senate Bill 379, An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools.

Under existing law, agencies must use statewide contracts established by DAS and DOIT for their purchases.¹ Section 9 of Senate Bill 379, however, would permit the superintendent of the regional vocational technical school system to purchase supplies, materials, equipment and contractual services independent of DAS under certain circumstances. Specifically, a vocational technical school would not have to use a statewide contract provided it can purchase from a business in the town in which the school seeking the goods or services is located at a lower cost than the cost of buying such goods or services through DAS, or if the goods and services cannot be obtained through DAS.

DAS believes that the existing procedures provide the best method to ensure a fair, open and competitive procurement process for the protection of the taxpayers. The existing requirement that all agencies - including the vocational technical schools - purchase their goods and services off of statewide contracts negotiated and awarded by DAS and DOIT serves many goals:

- It ensures a fair, open and competitive procurement process;
- It enables the state to leverage volume commitments to obtain better pricing than is offered through retail purchases;
- It gives the state the ability to lock-in prices for a specific period of time - something most retailers cannot guarantee;

¹ One exception to this rule is when the goods/services are less than \$50,000 and there is no statewide contract in place. In these situations, agencies are permitted to use their delegated purchasing authority to purchase necessary goods or services from vendors that do not have contracts with the state.

- It allows the state to obtain product warranties, guarantees, delivery and additional legal protections, which most retailers do not offer to walk-in customers; and
- It allows agencies to spend their time and resources on their core business, instead of "shopping around."

Moreover, the existing requirement that agencies purchase off of established contracts ensures that the ethics rules, anti-discrimination contract requirements, and other statutes that are designed to prevent kick-backs, influence trading, etc. are followed. It is simply not possible or practical to have every retailer provide the certifications and affidavits that contractors are required to execute under existing statutes. Mandating that all agencies use established contracts also reinforces other legislatively-enacted standards, such as the purchase of recycled goods and energy-efficient goods.

DAS respectfully submits that exempting the vocational technical schools from utilizing DAS and DOIT statewide contracts undermines all of these policy goals.

Thank you for considering DAS's views on this bill. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact DAS's legislative liaison, Andrea Keilty (713-5267).

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State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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Testimony of John Sylvestre, Electrical Department Head at
Ella Grasso Technical High School
State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A

SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools

Education Committee
March 8, 2010

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee,

My name is John Sylvestre and I am the Electrical Department Head at Ella T. Grasso Technical High School. I want to take a moment to applaud the efforts of this committee to help our system obtain the necessary funding to maintain the buildings and equipment in our schools.

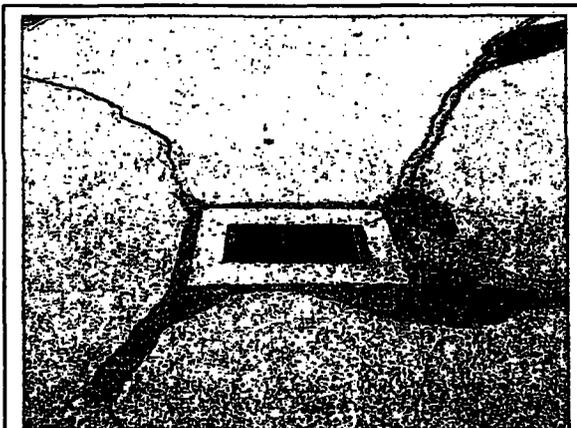
Prior to the Education Committee's forum on the Connecticut Technical High School System last month, many were probably led to believe that the CTHSS was operating smoothly. We thank you for the opportunity to illuminate the conditions in which we, and more importantly our students, must operate.

The two million dollars in SB 379 for maintenance and equipment provide a much needed addition to our system. Teaching at Ella Grasso every day makes me wonder if two million is sufficient. Everyday as I drive in I see a crumbling driveway and wonder about the impression it makes on parents who drive their students to school. As I have previously testified, every day I see ceiling tiles that have been removed and yet to be replaced. Every day I see desks that have been literally eaten away by termites. Every year we make requests to maintenance, as teachers throughout the system do for countless problems. Every year, maintenance lacks the funds to maintain these buildings.

While the crumbling of many of our facilities is evident to everyone, a much more insidious problem exists. Throughout our system, air quality problem

from mold to PCBs have been reported. While our superintendent responsibly moves from crisis to crisis, her actions are little more than a band-aid to cover a larger problem. There are buildings in our system that are far older and far less structurally sound than Ella T. Grasso, but no building can be preserved if there is no money available for necessary repairs or preventative maintenance. If the only time money can be found is for emergencies, then emergencies are inevitable. The buildings suffer, and the students suffer. Small repairs that cannot be made one year become huge, expensive repairs that have to be addressed the next. The money allotted for maintenance in SB 379 will help break the cycle of neglect.

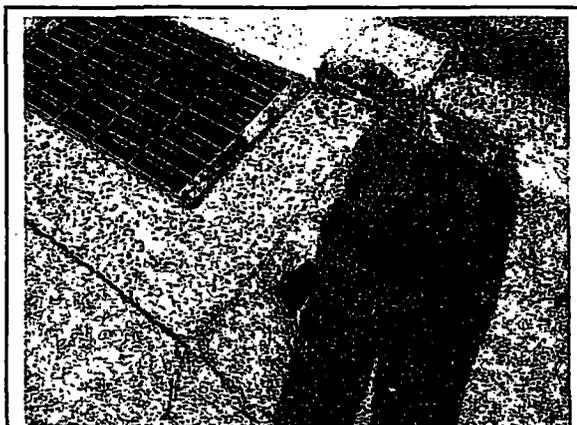
Thank you for your attention to the needs of our system.



Sinking Catch Basin



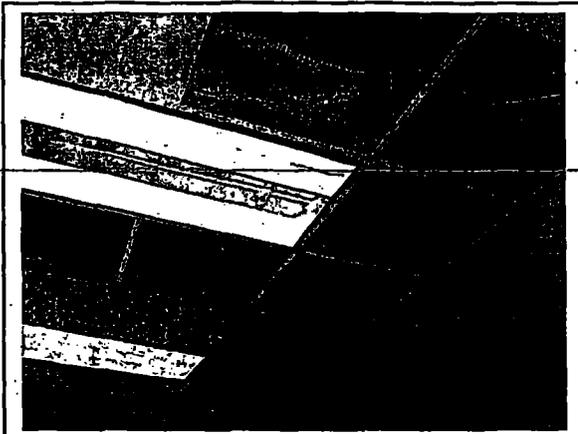
Driveway Crumbling



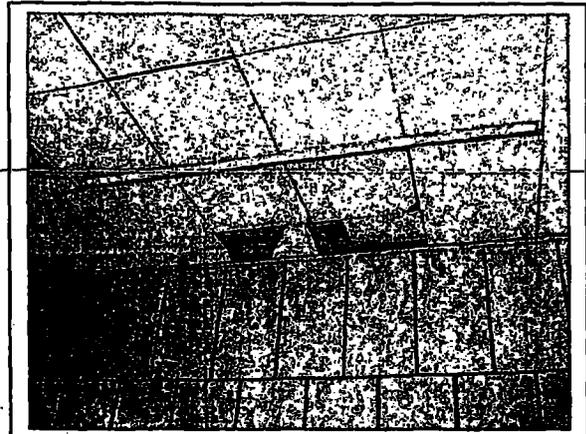
Erosion Catch Basin



Close Up



Missing Tiles in Ceiling



Dust Vent in Ceiling



Dust Collecting



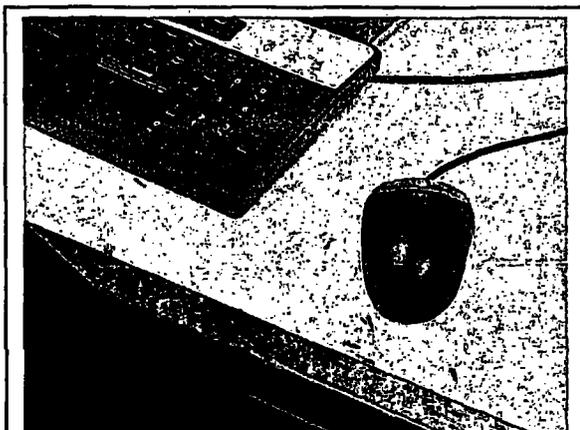
Broken Heaters



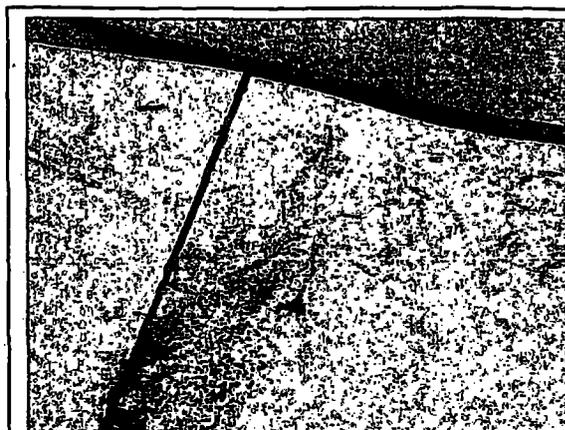
Duct Work and Vents Covered



Paint Peeling from Duct Work



Bugs at Teacher Station



Termites eat table away



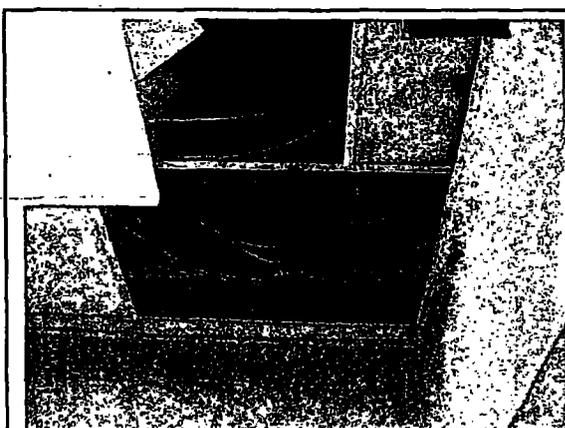
Rotting Window Sills



Rotting Window Frames



Metal Plates Replace Ceiling Tiles



Damaged Ceiling Tiles

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Testimony of Eric Sawyer, Related Education Department Head at
Henry Abbot Technical High School
State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200

SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools

Education Committee
March 8, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members;

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today concerning Connecticut's Vocational Technical High School System and the issues of funding that face our system. My name is Eric Sawyer. I am the Related Education Department Head and a science teacher at Henry Abbott Technical High School in Danbury. I have been a teacher at Abbott Tech for the past twenty years. I have also served in the position of Related Education Department Head (RDH) at Abbott Tech for the last seven years.

As the RDH at Abbott Tech, I am responsible for the following areas: science, math, math lab, and art, twelve department teachers, two support services teachers, and half the academic education for approximately 675 eager students. I am responsible for all my teachers meeting the content standards and expected performances set forth by the State Board of Education. For example, science teachers have 45 expected performances to meet for grades 9-10 (preparation for CAPT). These standards, many dealing with scientific inquiry (performing laboratories), all have to be met on an annual budget of approximately \$3,000. Actually that's not true; the \$3,000 is the annual budget for my entire department (science, math, math Lab, and art) for grades 9-12, not just grades 9-10 in science.

In any given year, I can easily spend one half of my budget on Art, based solely on the nature of the discipline and its use of consumable items. This then leaves me with \$1,500 to purchase materials for science (including lab

materials), math and math lab. I have not even taken into consideration books. A portion, if not all, of my annual \$3,000 budget may be needed to purchase books, especially for new or elective courses. With the cost of many new science and math books reaching approximately \$100 per copy, an elective course with fifteen students can easily use up half of my annual budget. Why should I, or any other person in my position, have to make the decision as to who will or will not get the materials they need to better teach our students because of a disgracefully small annual budget?

I am grateful the committee has heard our plea and recognized the desperate need for maintenance and equipment funding. I would ask you to consider language that would also include funding for much needed classroom supplies.

I appreciate and support the committee's efforts to make the Technical High School system's budget more transparent and accountable with SB 379. One would hope that the process will reveal the inadequate funds our system has faced for years and as I have described above. However, I do have reservations about making the individual school budgets available online. I feel it could invite criticism from those who are uninformed about our system. Surely those budgets could be made available to members of the General Assembly and others who need them without posting them online.

Having been a part of the teaching profession, in this system, for the past twenty years, I am well aware of the demands and rewards it has to offer to teachers and students alike. It is my hope that this bill and its call for a more transparent budget will bring to light the struggles we face for adequate funding. We as teachers need to be able to teach and, within reason, have the tools we need at our disposal to do our jobs.

I thank you for your effort to help our system and for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Testimony of Sue Loud, General Education Department Head at
Eli Whitney Technical High School
State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A

SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools

Education Committee
March 8, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members;

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am the General Education Department Head at Eli Whitney Technical High School.

The Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) has faced a number of challenges over the last several years. Discussion about how best to address these issues is long overdue and I applaud your efforts to rectify the problems with this bill.

As a thirteen year veteran of the CTHSS, I have taught at three of our schools and have seen firsthand the disparity that exists within our system. This Fall I returned to Eli Whitney to take on a new position. I transferred from Kaynor Tech in Waterbury, a school which had just undergone an extensive update. Many of my colleagues asked me how I could leave the palatial conditions at Kaynor to return to Whitney, a school that had not seen any significant renovation since its opening in 1957. As I walked into my office in August, I looked around at the decrepit furniture and ceiling with tiles that were in the process of falling down, I started to question my decision. Touring the classrooms and trade technology areas was depressing. The physical plant was old and tired and not worthy of our students and their desire to learn. Nevertheless, I knew that Whitney was on the bonding list for a renovation to the tune of \$98 million dollars. Surely I could hold on for a couple of years - the students had!

Then this past October, State Vocational Federation of Teachers President Rick Tanasi noticed that Whitney was no longer on the bonding list. The shock wave that reverberated among the faculty, staff and students of Whitney was intense. Students, their parents and instructors worried about the future of the school, especially wondering if we would be the next 'Wright Tech'. Was our school being neglected because they wanted to close it? Thankfully, SB 379 would alleviate some of the stress we are now facing. It not only addresses the closing of schools, but would provide funding for much needed maintenance and equipment.

Our students come to school every day and see a respectful learning community. Many of our students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and sharing this vision with them is critical for their present and future. The Whitney mission seeks to establish a safe and comprehensive learning environment for our students where everyone is accountable, respectful, and committed to the betterment of themselves and those in the community. It is very difficult to fulfill this mission successfully when the Governor will not release the funds approved by the General Assembly to renovate Eli Whitney Technical High School.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Testimony of Ed DeSousa, Masonry Department Head at
Bullard Havens Technical High School
State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A

SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools

Education Committee
March 8, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members;

My name is Ed DeSousa and I am the Masonry Department Head at Bullard Havens Technical High School in Bridgeport.

This year, our system is celebrating its 100th anniversary. Unfortunately, our purchasing system remains a relic of that time. As a Department Head, I am often left waiting well into September for money to be approved so I can buy supplies necessary to begin instruction. Meanwhile, my students can not receive the education they deserve. In my testimony to this committee last month, I discussed the cumbersome process that forced me to borrow a truck so I could obtain sixty dollars worth of sand that my students desperately needed to complete the masonry project they were assigned. Obviously, a purchasing process that cannot find sixty dollars for student education is woefully out of date.

The language in SB 379 addresses this problem. The required delivery of material before the start of the school year guarantees that students are not left waiting for the bureaucracy to grind on. Too often not only my students, but the students in production shops throughout the system, are left waiting for supplies that could be purchased with money that has already been approved. The flexibility provided in SB 379 best serves the needs of the students in our system. Every production teacher has valuable connections

within his or her community that can serve the financial needs of the state and the employment prospects of our students. However, we recognize that the superintendent is best positioned to differentiate between the legitimate connections between local business and the ethical demands of state purchasing. We believe that this bill does a good job in reconciling these interests.

As a Department Head in a production shop, I am greatly affected by the availability of adequate transportation to and from the job site. Too often I have had students waiting in the shops while production jobs, and the unique educational opportunities they afford, sit idle while our buses remain waiting for repair. Section 6 of SB 379 is a long overdue and much-welcome relief to our system. Too often our students are denied educational opportunities that relate directly to the jobs which they will soon occupy because ancient buses are unsafe. Too often the state denies itself a needed revenue stream because production work cannot be finished while buses sit remain waiting for repair.

While this bill is a much-needed and much-welcome step in the right direction, I respectfully ask you to consider some changes. The August 15th date for arranging bus inspection does not provide adequate time for the start of the school year. A July 10th inspection date would provide sufficient time to repair the buses before the students return. Additionally, there is no guarantee that a bus, used as hard as our buses may be used, will last ten full years. Believe me when I say we value our buses and every step is taken to protect them. However, problems happen. What will the State do when buses break down after eight years? I ask the committee to consider these scenarios when finalizing the bill.

As a graduate of our system, a business owner, and a teacher of 23 years, I understand the good our system can provide to our students and our state when it is allowed to do so. SB 379 is a welcome first step toward moving our system into the 21st century. I thank Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and the entire committee for its foresight, its courage, and its commitment to quality vocational and technical education for the students of Connecticut. I believe that the benefits of this bill will be felt immediately and well into our future.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Testimony of Rick Tanasi, President
State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A

SB 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools Education Committee March 8, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Committee members,

My name is Rick Tanasi and I am President of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A. SVFT represents over 1,200 exceptional professionals who teach in the Connecticut Technical High School System. Our members have the unique responsibility of providing students with a skilled trade and rigorous academic preparation for success in today's global economy.

In his "Race to the Top" initiative, President Barack Obama asked us all to reconsider the way we run our schools and thus help our students learn. Though not everyone may agree on the details of this initiative, we must all applaud its goal. Similarly, SB 379 is a much-needed attempt to help the Connecticut Technical High School System reconsider the way we organize our finances and our programs. For 100 years, the vocational-technical system has produced skilled workers who have greatly added to the economic life of our state. As a graduate of AI Prince Technical High School in Hartford, I know how a vocational technical education creates productive citizens. However, for too long, the political and financial systems in which we operate remain relics of a previous time. SB 379 is a necessary step toward running our system in a more modern, efficient way.

Senator Gaffey, at our last opportunity to appear before the committee, you expressed your frustration that neither the Board of Education nor the sub-board for the CTHSS reacted to the financial crisis that beset us at the start of the year. Both the legislature and our teachers become frustrated when we see appointed representatives allow serious problems in our system to go unaddressed. SB 379 subsection (a) addresses the need for two individuals with trade or technical experience to be incorporated into the State Board of Education. I believe this will have many positive affects in our future as an educational system. Looking at the current board members' terms we notice that none are due to expire until 2011 or 2013. With no vacancies, we respectfully ask how the changes SB 379 will occur?

The closing of JM Wright was an obvious example of the problem we have recently faced. It is not our intention to discuss the need to suspend JM Wright. However, the wisdom of section 1 in SB 379 is self-evident to anyone who has spoken to a

student who suddenly had to spend her senior year in a school 30 miles from her home, or a parent who is excited to see her child develop an interest in auto mechanics only to find that the opportunity was suddenly ending in June. The provisions in SB 379 should certainly help our system avoid another unfortunate travesty such as the one that occurred at JM Wright.

Section 3 of the bill is a welcome recognition of the inefficiencies and the political obstacles we face when we try to make our schools more responsive to the needs of our communities. A committee such as the one outlined in Section 3 would help ensure an active and responsible advisory committee that would effectuate our needs in a more open and transparent process. My only request is that a place be made on the advisory committee to represent the teachers and administrators within the schools. When a program's curriculum ceases to respond to the educational needs of our students and the economic needs of our communities, it is first evident to the people in the buildings. A voice on the committee that can discuss the actual practices in the building would well serve the goals and objectives of an advisory committee.

Section 3, subsection (b) discusses the need for the superintendent to submit "information regarding the employment status of students who graduate from the regional vocational-technical school system". We hope that the language of this statement also recognizes the employment status of the graduates from our adult programs. We recently experienced the Department of Education suspending the LPN program while maintaining it is no longer part of the system's mission statement. If our system had submitted information that showed the 100% job placement rate, the Governor would have known the success of a program before making her decision. As such, we request you consider incorporating a graduate survey that would show the tremendous success of our dental hygienist, aviation mechanics, and our CNA adult programs. Graduate surveys can provide necessary data to evaluate the success of individual programs and trades, and as a part of official record can be consulted before any funding decisions for these programs are made.

Lastly, in regards to Section 3, which requests our superintendent to publicize the budget, we feel making the system's budgets available on the web could invite criticism and future problems from a public that is uninformed about our system.

As President of the SVFT, I am proud to represent the fine educators who work in our system. Our teachers have been resourceful and selfless as they seek to educate students while over and over being told they must do without. Ultimately, their success must be affected by the materials they are provided, the direction in which the system is moving, and the facilities in which they work. Bill 379 is a necessary move to help our system provide vocational and technical education to thousands of young people throughout the state. We applaud Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and the whole committee for bringing the goal of educational reform to our system.

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CBIA*Connecticut Business & Industry Association*

**Testimony of Jesmin Basanti
Staff Attorney, CBIA
Before the Committee on Education
Hartford, Connecticut
March 8, 2010**

S.B. 379 An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools

Good Afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and all other members of the Committee. My name is Jesmin Basanti, Staff Attorney in Education Matters for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (hereinafter "CBIA"). CBIA represents approximately 10,000 member companies in virtually every industry. They range from large, global corporations to small, family owned businesses. The vast majority of our member companies have fewer than 50 employees.

CBIA and its members have long recognized that having a skilled workforce is a top priority for Connecticut businesses and appreciates the Education Committee's commitment to ensuring our workforce has the necessary tools to be successful. For this reason CBIA supports the intent of SB 379.

It is important that all students and their families understand the education and training opportunities offered in the technical school system to prepare students in the skilled trades, a critical sector of Connecticut's economy. This is why increasing public awareness of the technical school system is so important and reemphasizing the state's investment in school facilities and providing resources for equipment and supplies is so necessary.

Furthermore, we need to ensure that we are not just increasing the number of graduates from vocational-technical schools but that they are meeting the current technical school requirements, such as the NIMS (National Institute of Metalworking Skills)-certification. By having NIMS standards in place, our workforce will be able to match the skills required on a national level and by Connecticut Manufacturers throughout the state.

The business community strongly supports including these actions as part of the measure to strengthen our technical school system. By reallocating funds to ensure our technical school system is operating at its full potential, we can recruit and train more students in manufacturing technology programs. CBIA is encouraged by the legislative actions taken thus far and supports expanding those measures to promote and invest in Connecticut's Technical Schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**EDUCATION
PART 3
667 – 1010**

2010

(2)

Education Committee
March 8, 2010

Testimony of Patricia Ciccone
Superintendent of the Connecticut Technical High School System

ON

Raised Bill 379: ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

As the superintendent of the Connecticut Technical High School System, I have a number of concerns about Raised Bill 379, An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools, especially as they relate to the implementation phase of several of the provisions. While we understand and appreciate the General Assembly's concern for the status of our school system, there are a number of provisions in this bill that are borne out of misunderstandings and I would like to point those out as it is my hope that this proposal will help our struggling school system. To be clear, there is continuous communications with the schools throughout the budget process and central office has numerous opportunities throughout the fiscal year to weigh in on the Department of Education's biennium and mid-term budget requests. And with that, the struggle that the school system is currently facing is less relative to the agency's budgeting process, and more related to our ongoing efforts to surmount the fiscal crisis the state is facing which has resulted in numerous budget cuts, and a serious lack of bonding.

While we have some serious concerns with specific bill provisions, there are some provisions in this bill which we support and some we could support with some modifications to the proposed language. As the Commissioner indicated in his testimony, the proposal to require the State Board of Education's authority to take a formal vote before closing or suspending operations of a school is reasonable, as is the proposal to revise the composition of the Board to reflect a greater representation of the trades on the Board membership. While I support efforts in this bill to improve the safety of our bus fleet by mandating the removal of buses after 10 years of service, I'm concerned that doing so could result in a waste of resources if the buses are still functioning safely. In addition, we have concerns about being required to remove buses from the road without any guarantee that funds will be available to replace those buses.

From our perspective of always trying to reduce operating costs, I support the proposal to allow the technical high schools to purchase supplies or contractual services from local businesses rather than through Department of Administrative Services (DAS) exclusively. However, as noted in the public forum, I am very concerned about additional burdens on principals, department heads and teachers to create, and manage budget processes as is implied in the provision that would require each school to submit a request to DAS for all supplies, materials and contractual services for the full school year. This provision could place a huge administrative burden on our schools and it is not