

State Vocational Federation of Teachers



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Testimony of Rick Tanasi, President

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HB 6385 An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education

Education Committee

February 23, 2011

To Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, and members of the Education Committee:

As President of the nearly 1200 members of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers, it is my honor to represent the educators who provide over 10,000 Connecticut students outstanding technical and academic education. There is truly no system like ours in the country, in which educators from across the state collaborate to provide students the skills and knowledge necessary for both students and their employers to thrive.

The Connecticut Vocational-Technical School System has never been healthier. The teachers, through their union, and Central Office now work collaboratively to ensure that students from Danielson to Danbury can benefit from the strategies and educational initiatives that lead to student growth in all areas. The level of cooperation, the sharing of a common vision between the administrators, Central Office, and the teachers, can be seen in many ways. The Good Jobs, Green Jobs and Tools for Schools initiatives have been nationally recognized as a model for teachers' unions and school system management working together. We regularly collaborate on professional development, on evaluation instruments, and many other issues. The results of that collaboration can be seen everywhere. Enrollment is up. CAPT scores are up. NOCTI scores are up. Our system is doing a better job educating students than we have ever done before.

This success has been achieved because we are a school system, not a disparate collection of schools. While the trades each school offers reflect the employment needs of the local region, the way we teach students must be consistent. The Automotive teacher in Torrington shares the same needs and concerns as the Automotive teacher in Milford; he does not remotely have the same issues as a teacher in the surrounding towns who teaches an auto shop class as part of an industrial arts curriculum. The English teacher in Bridgeport who is preparing a 10th grade student for the CAPT with only 92 days of academics per year needs to work with the teacher in Manchester who faces the same challenge, not the teacher in Stratford who sees the same students all year long. No one understands the unique demands of providing vocational-technical education than the Connecticut Vocational-Technical School system.

Obviously, we understand the difficult times we are in. We understand that everyone must play a role in addressing this crisis. However, we believe this proposal strikes at the very foundation of what Connecticut's economic strength has always been and on which we will always rely – a skilled, highly educated work force. Before this proposal is even considered, we suggest that a study group be formed to investigate what the impact of moving the Connecticut Vocational-Technical School system will have on the quality of technical education our students receive. The reforms that our system has undertaken under the leadership of Superintendent Ciccone and with the active participation of the SVFT will be lost, and the highly-skilled technical education our system can uniquely provide will be marginalized or lost.

A study group should look at what our system has accomplished of late, and see if those accomplishments could be furthered or even replicated were the system to be disbanded. The group should examine the benefits of increasing our independence as a system, and help us increase our ability to meet the changing needs of the state in a comprehensive and cost-effective manner. This proposal is a radical step, and its implications must be studied before anyone considers its enactment. We believe that after a careful examination of what our teachers and our system have accomplished, the clearer it will be that this proposal must be rejected. Thank you.