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**Testimony of
Anne LaMonica
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**Education Committee
Public Hearing**

**March 20, 2017
Legislative Office Building**

**Testimony in Support of Raised Senate Bill 1014
AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS
TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES (Sec. 9)**

Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of our Catholic School families, with over 25,000 students and over 2,000 employees, I thank your committee for raising and considering Senate Bill 1014, Section 9.

Section 9 of SB 1014 presents a good opportunity to establish a new pilot program to provide *inter-town* bus transportation for students who attend nonpublic schools in a nearby town.

A very similar bill passed the General Assembly in 2016, which established a pilot program for students from East Haven to obtain bus transportation to attend nonpublic schools in New Haven. Public Act, 16-188, Sec. 6:

Sec. 6. (Effective July 1, 2016) (a) For the school years commencing July 1, 2016, to July 1, 2025, inclusive, the local board of education for the East Haven school district shall participate in a pilot program to provide school transportation services for resident students to attend an equivalent nonpublic school located in the New Haven school district. For purposes of this subsection, "resident student" means any student who is a resident of the town of East Haven and, for the school year commencing July 1, 2015, was enrolled in a nonpublic school located in the school district that ceased operations on or after January 1, 2016. (b) The East Haven school district shall be reimbursed only for the cost of such transportation as is required by this section upon the same basis and in the same manner as such school districts are reimbursed pursuant to section 10-281 of the general statutes.

This East Haven–New Haven pilot has been a great help for East Haven families. For the 2015-16 school year, prior to St. Vincent De Paul School's closure, East Haven's nonpublic transportation budget was \$175,000, and it is now under \$40,000 for the pilot this year. In comparison, East Haven budgeted over \$1.6 million for public student transportation for this school year, of which \$237, 00 allocated for vocational/agricultural education students. Meanwhile, since St. Vincent De Paul School closed, East Haven no longer budgets \$34,000 for its school nurse coverage. At the same time, East Haven has continued to run a surplus and recently announced that is planning no tax increase for its 2017-18 budget. We thank East Haven for its cooperation with this small program and for its support of its residents.

Similar regional transportation programs for nonpublic school students have been implemented in both New York state and Rhode Island.

Our 100 Catholic Schools – along with other faith-based and nonpublic schools – are part of the fabric of our State that strongly enhance our quality of life. Many families choose a faith-based school based upon their own beliefs, family traditions, and size of the school. We attract a wide-range of students, where 22% of our students are not Catholic and 31% of our students are minorities.

Our schools face the same changes in demographics as public schools. With careful planning, a few of our schools have announced mergers on account of these changes. As a result, some students will have to cross town lines in order to attend their new school.

Respectfully, we fully understand budget concerns this year. Nevertheless, when a school closes and students continue their curricula in a neighboring town, the closure should not be a small windfall to the students' hometown at the expense of the students' safety. Not only are the students not adding costs to the public school system, the town no longer has to provide nonpublic student nurse coverage and intra-town transportation. These students and their families are resident taxpayers. Accordingly, it is reasonable for the town to help transport them to their nearby schools at a reasonable cost.

Moreover, inter-town transportation for nonpublic schools is not new; it was established in CT in 1978 with by P.A. 78-278(a), Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-280a. At that time, the state provided partial funding to the students' home town. The constitutionality of that statute with its funding clause was upheld by the United States District Court of Connecticut in 1979. The court noted well that district lines are referential to the operations of public education.

"Delineation of school districts is simply the means by which the State arranges for the provision of public education. Because the responsibility for public education has been divided geographically into districts does not metaphysically transform bussing across district lines into a "special benefit" for non-public school children." *Cromwell Property Owners Ass'n v. Toffolon*, 495 F. Supp. 915 (D. Conn. 1979).

The funding language was ultimately removed in 1989, and now the statute remains a voluntary option for towns. Sec. 9 of SB 1014 as it stands has the same effect as this

statute. Therefore, I ask that you consider adding language that requires a student's town to provide for the reasonable cost of transportation.

Transportation of students spans both public and nonpublic education as a matter of public safety. Student safety is the overriding priority of Connecticut's school transportation statutes and the only limitation for nonpublic student transportation ought to be the per pupil expenditure, which is hinted at by Sec. 9 (c) of S.B. 1014.

Chief Justice Francis M. McDonald, then Associate Justice, opined: "Children are required by law to attend school and whether they have transportation is a matter of public importance." *Board of Ed. Town of Stafford v. State Board of Education*, 243 Conn. 772 (1998).

Those that choose to enroll their children in a nonpublic school, or faith-based school, within a reasonable distance of their home, should be treated similarly to students who apply to and attend vocational-technical schools, agricultural, magnet schools, and charter schools.

"The bright yellow school bus with its flashing red lights is a symbol of safe and reliable transportation.⁸ it represents no more state involvement on behalf of its passengers than that of the ambulance, police and fire services offered to all schools, religious or secular, private or public." Ibid.

Finally, please consider the loss of routes for our reliable bus drivers in the towns where a school is being closed. Their salaries contribute to the collection of sales, property, and income taxes, which all contribute to the public good.

Please see the attached fact sheet about our schools that addresses accreditation, diversity, tuition aid, charity, and accountability.

Thank you for your support of Sec. 9 of SB 1014, and I urge you to add the funding language so that the bill achieves its intended benefit for students.

Please contact Anne LaMonica or Bob Shea if you should have any questions.



Anne LaMonica
Associate Director for Education

SENATE BILL 1014 – SECTION 9 →

Sec. 9. (*Effective July 1, 2017*) (a) For the school years commencing July 1, 2016, to July 1, 2025, inclusive, the local or regional boards of education for each town located within fifteen miles of the school districts of West Hartford, New Haven, Shelton and Montville, shall participate in a pilot program to provide school transportation services for resident students to attend an equivalent nonpublic school located in the school districts of West Hartford, New Haven, Shelton and Montville. Any request made by a resident student for the provision of such

transportation services under this section shall be made to the local or regional board of education for the town of such resident student at least thirty days prior to receiving such transportation services. For purposes of this subsection, "resident student" means any student who is a resident of a town located within fifteen miles of the school districts of West Hartford, New Haven, Shelton and Montville, and, for the school years commencing July 1, 2016, to July 1, 2025, is enrolled in a nonpublic school located in the school districts of West Hartford, New Haven, Shelton and Montville.

(b) The local or regional board of education for the town of any resident student who requests and receives transportation services under subsection (a) of this section shall be reimbursed in an amount equal to the cost of such transportation for such resident student by either the resident student or by the nonpublic school that such resident student is enrolled.

(c) A local or regional board of education shall not be required to provide such transportation services under this section if fewer than ten resident students request such board to provide such transportation services.

(d) A local or regional board of education providing such transportation services under this section may designate one or more pick-up and drop-off locations within the town.

OPEN TO ALL FAITHS

22% Students are non-Catholic

ACROSS THE STATE

- 19 High Schools
- 82 Elementary Schools
- 3 Special Needs Schools
- 25,000+ Students
- 2,000+ Employees

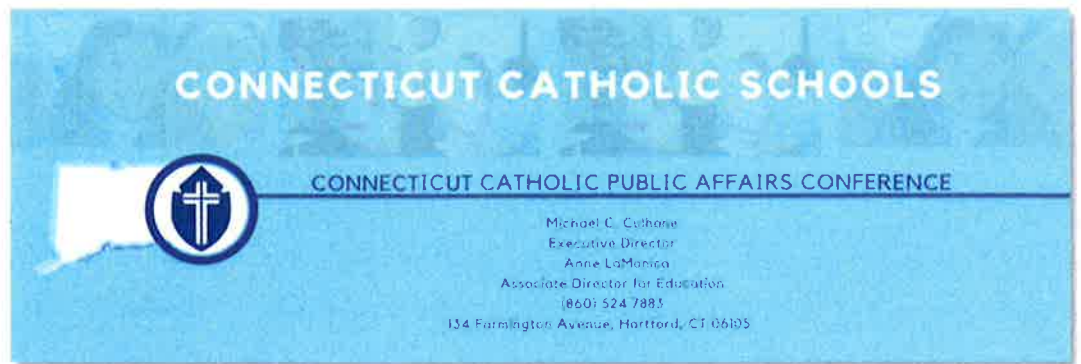
SAVE TAXPAYERS HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

ACCOUNTABLE

- Accredited by New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
- Teachers complete over 40 hours of professional development/year
- TerraNova® & Iowa Assessments®
- Blue Ribbon Schools of National Recognition
- 100 % High School Graduation Rate
- 99% of graduating high school seniors go on to college
- Nationally recognized curriculum mapping

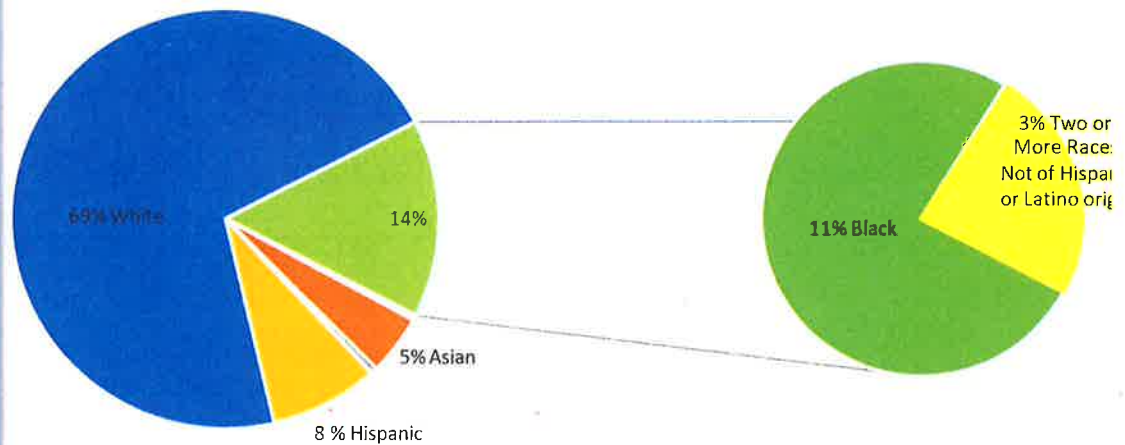
CONNECTED

Catholic Schools do business with local vendors, such as: food vendors, landscapers, booksellers, and tradespersons.



DIVERSE

2014 CT Catholic Schools Average Diversity %
Source: NCES Dataset



CHALLENGING

Catholic Schools emphasize individual growth. Theresa Oei is a Presidential Scholar, **Connecticut Science Fair winner**, cheerleader for the New England Patriots, an International Irish step dancer, and a 2011 graduate of East Catholic High School with a B.S. in molecular biophysics and biochemistry, Yale University.

She currently works at the Broad Institute of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard studying genome-editing techniques.

CHARITABLE

The Archdiocese of Hartford and the Dioceses of Bridgeport & Norwich provided over **\$12,000,000 in tuition aid** to students in 2015.

Catholic High School Students complete at least **100 Community Service Learning Hours**, generating thousands of hours of service.

As an example of one of many, East Catholic High School student Grace Mazzarella received the **2014 Better Business Bureau's Student Ethics Award and Scholarship** and was recognized by Aurora Women and Girls Foundation in West Hartford for her commitment to community service. Grace started a project for Feeding Children Everywhere project at ECHS. Now an annual event, enough items were collected for over 45,000 meals in for Haiti and Uganda.

