

Environment Committee

Thursday, March 14, 2018

Charles Catania – Testifying on SB 345

Members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Charles Catania, and I am here today to **oppose** SB 345: AN ACT CONCERNING CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS. While its concept may be noble, I'm deeply concerned about the consequences of this legislation.

I believe in climate change, and I believe reasonable people can disagree about its causes. That said, this is not a bill about climate change or, even, the environment. Instead, this is a bill that puts local control in the crosshairs.

Local school boards should hold the power to decide whether or not curriculum like this should be introduced into their classrooms. According to a September 2017 *CT Mirror* report, entitled "The State of CT's Public Schools in Charts" and authored by Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Jake Kara, "[i]n Bridgeport and Hartford, two of the largest school districts in the state, only a quarter of the students are reading at grade level and half are significantly behind."

Shouldn't the school boards in those towns decide whether it is appropriate to take teachers away from core competencies to teach concepts like climate change? In 2016, I spent nearly an hour listening to a Tolland teacher lament that schools are mandated to teach computer skills --- not because she doesn't want her students proficient in technology, but because it takes them out of the classroom, where many already struggle.

As somebody who works in the cross-section of executive branding and technology, I believe that young people who understand the basics of computing, including rudimentary coding, are at a great advantage in the 21st century workforce. I see it play out, literally, on a daily basis. That said, no matter how deeply I believe that students should be familiar with technology, I cannot deny that time spent on such programs takes away from time spent on fundamentals. It would be presumptuous of us to think that we know better what students need than local governing bodies that are in constant communication with teachers and administrators on the ground.

If you agree that students and school districts in Farmington, Branford, East Hampton, New Milford, New Haven, and Norwich all have different needs based on differing circumstances, then, respectfully, I cannot see how you could pass this bill through committee. I am prepared to answer any questions and engage in a productive dialogue with members of the committee. Thank you.

Charles Catania

Vernon, CT