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To: The Entire Senate Education Committee and Chairman Senator James J. Rhoades

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To: All Members of the Independent Regulatory Review Commission

To: All Members of the House Education Committee and Chairman James Roebuck

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

From: Kimberly D. Geyer, 451 Denny Road, Valencia, PA 16059, Butler County, 724-799-1195

Date: May 9th, 2008

2:41 pm

Re: Chapter 4, GCA's Public Hearing on May 14th, 2008, Please enter this testimony for the record.

Despite all states moving to exit exams doesn't equate to American Colleges seeing better prepared freshmen, because most high school state exit exams do not appear to be aligned with the knowledge and skills that are necessary for college readiness. Of the 65% of public high school students that must pass an exit exam in order to graduate, the 23 states with exit exams (many done with the help of ACHIEVE, Inc. the same group proposed by Governor Rendell and PPC) only six states indicated their test was designed to measure the knowledge and skills needed for college. Only nine of the 23 states said their tests were intended to measure readiness for the workplace.....this is according to the Center on Education Policy's national survey and white paper on "High School Exit Exams" released on September 6th, 2007.

The CEP survey responses identified the purpose of the exit exam of preparing students for life after high school was among the "least identified purposes" for implementing high school exit exams. In fact, less than 38% of the participating states reported that determining prospective high school graduate's knowledge and skill levels relative to those needed for entry-level employment was a purpose for implementing high school exams, while only 25% of the states reported the purpose was to prepare for college readiness.

A majority of states instead use the high school exit exams to measure mastery of state designed curriculum and standards, a pattern suggesting that the states lack a clear idea of the purpose of the exit exams or the need of tough standards. The Governor's Commission on College and Career Success's first recommendation is "Require all Pennsylvania high school students to demonstrate proficiency on Pennsylvania's academic standards to graduate....." defines the "purpose" in which Pennsylvania plans to utilize the exit exam test....for the purpose of measuring mastery of the standards. Pennsylvania already accomplishes that task with the PSSA now. But, does this necessarily equate to college or career readiness? There is an obvious disconnect in education between the high school and college level and the college level and workplace.....lack of communication as well as lack of consensus. Many state officials said their high schools and colleges have not discussed tying the exit exams to what students need to know in college. The states of Maryland and Washington were exceptions, and many states have moved toward more challenging tests.

Our nation produces graduates from states with state exit exams who have scored proficient or advanced in mastery of their respective state standards, yet, our nation is still yielding increasing remedial results of students in colleges. There is no outstanding or noteworthy state with the distinction of proving themselves through this reform effort based on data, research, and evidence which reinforce either college readiness or career readiness of graduating students. There is no history of data to ensure to the rest of the nation, that this reform is effective and there is no history of a specific state with noteworthy results of specific students having success post high school as a result of the exit exam reform.

In other words, if it's to measure mastery of standards, then that's what needs to be conveyed. Pennsylvania schools and students already know from the PSSA which students have mastered the standards with proficiency and those who have not. The only difference now is that graduation is being withheld to the bottom percentage of students not scoring proficient or advanced on the PSSA or passage of the required GCA portions.

Second, if it is tied to and to provide college readiness, then that's what all colleges and universities, students, schools, and stakeholders need to be informed of. If the purpose is to serve employment readiness, then, employers need to be informed ahead of time so we can all be prepared to meet the expectations and glean the results accordingly. But the assumption that all three factors can be achieved through one assessment process is complete absurdity.

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Click on the link called "The PSSA Page" and/or the link "Mandating the PSSA" for additional white papers, testimony, and research on the PSSA/GCA process since 1993.

Personal Note to Senate Committee Members:

I have independently studied the Chapter 4/ PSSA process since its inception and transformation of the Tells Test and Outcomes Based Education Movement in the early 1990's here in Pennsylvania with no self financial gain or self serving interest. I wrote one of the first white papers on the PSSA back in 1999 when no one else had one here in the state, inclusive of the PDE or PSBA which now does. To this day, as I've been told by many who contact me from across the Commonwealth, I have only one of the only websites in the entire state, other than the PDE which is available free to the public taxpayer with historical research on the PSSA which is often accessed by teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, legislators and education professionals working on their thesis or doctorate or other needs requiring accurate information. In the early 1990's I was actively involved and can recall the people, places, and timeline of events and accounts leading us to the point we now find ourselves as a commonwealth in this regards. Therefore, it is my hope that you will take the time to access my website the two links mentioned above in which I have dedicated pages to the GCA's, inclusive of my remarks made to the SBOE, Education Secretary Zavorachak last November in a meeting, radio show remarks, outline of the history, and progression of the reform being proposed.

More recently, on April 24th, Mars Area School District with Commonwealth Education Organization hosted an informational forum on the GCA/PSSA proposal by the SBOE in which I moderated the forum. On the panel: Barbara Supinka of AFT, Michael Allison of PAESSP, Dr. Judith Mosse, Vice President of PAGE, Beth Winters, legislative director of PSBA, Mike Crossey, PSEA Vice-President, Shauna D'Alessandro, SHASDA President, Suzie Gerst Treasurer of PTA, the NAACP, Dr. William Pettigrew of PASA

and PARSS, and Dr. David Saxe, former SBOE member all participated. Members of the SBOE, Secretary Zavorchak, Joan Benso of PPC, and various PDE officials all declined an invitation to attend the April 24th event.

If you would like me to come out to the May 14th hearing, or at some other point in time to Harrisburg to provide information and/or discuss this proposal with you, please do not hesitate to contact me at anytime if I may be of help or assistance to you in your legislative capacity. I am also available by phone or e-mail. Furthermore, I will be sending these same comments to the Independent Regulatory Review Committee and House Education Committee members for their record as well.

As we all know, this is a highly political reform in what is just another one of many reforms in a string of bad policy reforms adopted by Pennsylvania to improve education with lackluster results. As I stated to Senator Rhoades when he chaired the September 17th, 1998 hearing on Chapter 4 in Harrisburg, I will convey once again as it's applicable to ALL in the General Assembly and IRRC..... just ten years later...

Pennsylvania will support leadership that respects and supports the rights of parents and one which supports sound educational practices and principles to Pennsylvania's schools. May you have the courage to do so. This reform is wrong for our students, schools, and the future of education here in Pennsylvania. It will take great courage to admit such and great leadership to resist the pressures of modern education reform coming from the Governor and his administration advocating with intense pressure this reform which contradicts and flies in the face of representative government and erodes our freedoms and local control within this Commonwealth.

May you ALL have the courage to do so. This is "the reform" which is worth fighting against here in Pennsylvania....if this reform is ultimately adopted, this will not only change the future of education in Pennsylvania.....in my own humble opinion, nothing else you do in the future will matter from that point on as pertaining to education, kids, and schools here in Pennsylvania. Please fight the fight as the rest of us are attempting to do!!

Sincerely,
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