

## House Republican Press Release

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### **Reps Burns, Hamzy, Nicastro; Threatened Religious, Private Schools In CT Deserve State Support**



Three Bristol area legislators who attended a reception at the St. Anthony Church Parish Hall Tuesday pledged their support for legislative initiatives to provide constitutionally permissible assistance to economically threatened religious and private schools in Connecticut.

The legislators, state representatives Ron Burns, R-77<sup>th</sup> District, William A. Hamzy, R-78<sup>th</sup> District, and Frank N. Nicastro Sr., D-79<sup>th</sup> District, said they would support legislation to appropriate funds for the purchase of textbooks that then would be loaned to religious and private schools and help relieve the financial burden many of the schools are facing.

The legislators said they also would support a measure to establish tax credit programs under which corporations receive tax credits for donations to scholarship funds that provide tuition assistance to low- and middle income families, enabling them to enroll their children in religious or private schools they otherwise could not afford.

Neither proposal would directly support the religious missions of parochial schools and would not lead to legal challenges on constitutional grounds, the legislators said.

“The state and Connecticut taxpayers have a compelling interest in keeping religious and private schools open and affordable to low- and middle-income families. Catholic schools save Connecticut taxpayers more than \$400 million every year. If large numbers of Catholic schools are forced to close over the next few years and public schools have to accommodate the large influx of new students that would result, much of that \$400 million saving would quickly turn into a loss. In Bristol alone, 972 students attend private or religious schools and 679 of those students are residents,” Representative Burns said.

“We as legislators can be very supportive of these proposals. But since the 2008 legislative session is a short one, it would make enactment of these measures more likely if supporters like yourselves would turn out in large numbers if a public hearing can be scheduled,” Representative Nicastro said at the reception.

“Parochial and private schools play a very important role in educating children in the Greater Bristol area and elsewhere in Connecticut,” Representative Hamzy said. “When those schools need assistance to remain open and continue to provide a quality education, it is in the state’s interest to provide them with whatever help it can, as long as it does not support those schools’ religious missions. In Bristol, schools like St. Anthony’s, St.

Joseph's, St. Matthew's, and St. Paul junior high and high school have educated thousands of Bristol area students over the years and will continue to do so well into the future, as long as they have the resources they need to get the job done.”