

## Sheff Supporters Look To Intervene In Suit Challenging Connecticut Schools' Racial Quotas

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Lawyers and a lead plaintiff who brought the Sheff v. O'Neill school-desegregation court case a generation ago are seeking to intervene in a new lawsuit challenging the use of race in enrollment decisions for the Hartford region's network of magnet schools.

The Pacific Legal Foundation filed a federal suit in February alleging that efforts by the state to boost white enrollment in magnet schools violate the constitutional rights of black and Latino students who are turned away.

Now, Elizabeth Horton Sheff and the parents and grandparents of minority schoolchildren in Hartford are seeking to intervene in that suit and challenge its legal attack on the methods used to diversify the magnets.

The lawsuit by the Pacific Legal Foundation, a limited-government nonprofit organization that opposes affirmative action policies, followed a series in *The Courant* last year that reported on efforts to diversify Hartford-area schools under the Sheff suit. The series, "Hartford Schools: More Separate, Still Unequal," described how the magnet school lottery was engineered to favor white students, and revealed that, in the quest to meet integration standards after the lottery is over, some magnet schools leave seats empty rather than enroll black and Latino students who are next in line on waiting lists.



LaShawn Robinson, whose five children have sought unsuccessfully to attend regional magnet schools, speaks at a news conference announcing a lawsuit challenging racial quotas used to diversify magnet schools under the Sheff v. O'Neill desegregation ruling. (Matthew Kauffman / Hartford Courant)

The foundation argues that those policies are unconstitutional. But Sheff advocates say race-conscious decisions are legal and appropriate to meet the state Supreme Court's demand that the state provide integrated classrooms, in part by attracting a sufficient number of "reduced-isolation" children — the term used for students who are not black or Latino.

The motion to intervene was filed by lawyers and groups involved in the original Sheff lawsuit, including attorneys Martha Stone of the Center for Children's Advocacy and Dennis Parker of the American Civil Liberties Union's Racial Justice Program.

In legal papers, they wrote that contrary to the Pacific Legal Foundation's claims, "the thousands of Hartford-resident minority students who have applied without success to a magnet school through the lottery and the perhaps dozens of empty magnet seats stem not from the utilization of the reduced isolation standard; but rather result from the placement of funding caps and capacity limitations on the magnet schools."

The lawyers wrote that attorneys for the Pacific Legal Foundation consent to the Sheff advocates' motion to join the case.