

Good morning. I am here to speak on behalf of SB808: "An Act Concerning State Grants for the Benefit of Head Start Facilities."

My name is Jerry Reisman. I am the Director of the Manchester Board of Education Head Start program. We serve 132 three- and four-year-old students and their families. We generally have about 50-60 families on our waiting list. Less than 70% of the students entering Manchester kindergartens have had a preschool experience.

Our Head Start program benefits greatly from its relationship with the Manchester Board of Education. Our teachers must hold State Teacher Certifications and engage in rigorous professional development throughout their tenure. The Board of Education provides us with real and in-kind dollars to support rent, utilities, and access to a host of content specialists in order to meet each child's individual needs. The school system values our program because our students enter kindergarten with the necessary prerequisite skills needed to succeed in school.

Manchester has recently benefited from the ability to access both school construction funds through the State Department of Education, as well as funds through the Department of Social Service's CHEFA program (CT Health and Educational Facilities Administration). As a result, the Town of Manchester will be able to construct an early childhood facility that will increase enrollment by 45% for the net cost to Manchester of about 5% of the total project cost.

School districts across the state are struggling to create space for full-day kindergarten. Without a funding mechanism in place to create or expand existing early childhood facilities, municipalities, even those with the necessary infrastructure to

support an early childhood facility, will have to choose between expanding kindergarten services, or creating the capacity to serve preschool-age children and their families.

If passed, SB808 will give municipalities across the State of Connecticut the opportunity to create early childhood centers of excellence. Our State Department of Education has indicated that local school districts should take leadership in the universal access to pre-K services. Under SB808, municipalities will not have to choose between expanding either kindergarten or early childhood services. They will be able to create a high-quality, dynamic model that will serve our most vulnerable students and their families.