

TO: Connecticut General Assembly, Education Committee
FROM: ~~Jim Santa Barbara, Veteran Milford Teacher, 31 Hitching Post, Milford,~~
Ben Blake, Milford Board of Aldermen, 5 Anchorage Drive, Milford
RE: SB1114 and RB7176
DATE: February 20, 2007

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the committee.

We would like to speak in favor of the portion of Senate Bill 1114 which increases the State Guaranteed Wealth Level, as well as the section of Raised Bill 7176 which reduces the threshold for special education excess cost grants and increases reimbursement percentages. Both proposals are steps forward in how Connecticut should fund education, but both are baby steps. Connecticut can and should do more.

Specifically, we would like the State Guaranteed Wealth Standard to increase to the level proposed under the original law. When initially contemplated, the ECS formula set the Wealth Standard component at approximately two (2) times the town wealth of the town with the median wealth. Over the years, the standard has eroded at the expense of municipalities like Milford. Please consider raising the State Guaranteed Wealth Level beyond the 1.75 figure proposed by the Governor and SB 1114.

With respect to funding special education, the proposals incorporated in RB 7176 demonstrate progress. However, local school districts like Milford need even more help. Special education already accounts for roughly twenty five percent of our city's school budget, and special education costs continue to rise. We are hopeful that the State will increase special education funding for municipalities above and beyond the levels recommended in RB 7176. In a perfect Connecticut, this committee would dismiss RB 7176, and instead, favorably report-out SB 499 which fully funds special education in our state.

As you well know, free public education is a fundamental right guaranteed by Connecticut's Constitution, but as of late, there has been an unfortunate, damaging decline in education investment. Nonetheless, we are confident that our State will reaffirm its commitment to education funding, and adopt our suggested enhancements to SB 1114 and RB 7176.