



**CGA Education Committee
Public Hearing February 20, 2007**

Comments Submitted by Katherine Wilson, School Finance Specialist

Bill 1114, AAC Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Education

Bill 7135, AAC The Foundation Level of the Education Cost Sharing Grant and the Minimum Expenditure Requirement

Bill 7176, AAC Special Education

Bill 7177, AAC Family Resource Centers

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut supports a system of public education funding that makes available to each community financial resources sufficient to provide a suitable program of educational experiences to each child. We believe the state should fund through grants to towns 50% of the overall statewide cost of public elementary and secondary education and that the distribution of state funds should reflect both the relative ability of different communities to finance schools from local resources and the various factors that influence the cost of educating different children. We also believe that additional targeted measures should be directed at improving academic achievement in communities with concentrations of disadvantaged children. It is on the basis of these positions that I offer comment on the above bills before the committee today.

The governor's budget recommendations for education as laid out in Bill 1114 represent a major step toward the goal of a 50% state/local education cost share for Connecticut, particularly as they pertain to the Education Cost Sharing grant. We are concerned, however about two aspects of the governor's ECS proposal: its definition of the **Foundation** and its setting of the **Minimum Expenditure Requirement**.

Rather than a flat dollar amount, either as proposed by the governor or in Bill 7135, we would prefer that the methodology for determining the **Foundation** be defined in statute. This methodology should be cost-indexed and enable all towns to spend at a predetermined, appropriate level, thus rendering the determination of the Foundation rational, transparent, and sensitive to changes in actual education costs.

A **Minimum Expenditure Requirement** at the level of the 127th ranked town two fiscal years prior is inadequate. It would place no obligation on higher-spending towns to apply any portion of their increase in ECS to education, and many such towns are home to severely underperforming schools. Furthermore, as we read this provision of Bill 1114, it would in fact allow towns to reduce their education spending, as long as they stayed above the level specified. We prefer the approach taken in Bill 7135, though we would like to see towns with successful schools given some flexibility to apply their aid increases to property tax relief.

With respect to **Special Education**, we applaud a fully funded Student-Based Excess Cost grant, though we would like to see the reimbursement level set lower than the current 4.5 multiplier. The tiered approach taken in Bill 7176, while lowering the reimbursement threshold, seems overly complex and fails to absolutely cap a local district's obligation. We are also concerned that, with elimination of the Excess Cost Equity grant proposed by the governor, total grants for special education would fall below the projected total necessary to maintain current services.

The League supports the addition of Parents As Teachers programs at **Family Resource Centers** as proposed in Bill 7177. A solid connection between home and school is critical to the academic success of children, and parents are a child's earliest teachers. Family resource centers build connections with families and help schools become part of communities from the time children are very young. These connections follow those children into the classroom and improve their chances of becoming successful learners. The addition of Parents As Teachers programs would certainly strengthen that process and add to the home support so critical to children's academic success.