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Testimony of John Yrchik
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Regarding

Bill No. 1114 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education

Before the

Joint Committee on Education

February 20, 2007

My name is John Yrchik. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association. I am here today to testify in support of Bill No. 1114 " An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education."

I have come before you many times to testify on the chronic problem of ECS funding. It is therefore indeed a pleasure to come before you today in support of a bold initiative, one that goes a long way toward righting the funding inequity in Connecticut's public schools.

Two years ago I spoke to this committee about what appeared to be an impending "perfect storm": the volatile mix of chronic under-funding of the ECS formula, escalating property taxes, and the federal government's imposition of an unrealistic and grossly underfunded mandate.

Understandably cautious, reluctant to spend the necessary money to right the ECS formula, our state has by now thoroughly studied this problem. The debate over Education Cost Sharing funding has gone on over the last four biennial budget deliberations. CEA commissioned a study over eight years ago that identified the core problems of the formula. Governor Rell's predecessor created a high-level task force, which identified the same problems. Its recommendations were largely ignored.

And now, in sharp contrast, Governor Rell not only created a Commission on Education Finance to overhaul the funding formula, but she has proposed a budget to implement its recommendations. Among other things, the Governor's budget would lift the cap on aid to cities and towns, increase the foundation dramatically, and redefine poverty to mean those students receiving free and reduced price lunch. All towns would get more aid and the state would finally realize the goal of funding 50% of the total for public education.

We applaud the Governor for her leadership in breaking the long stalemate with this proposal. We also stand in strong support of the additional assistance the budget provides for pre-K education. These proposals, without question, are far-sighted and fundamental for the future of education in our state.

It is said that "To every thing there is a season ..." This is the season to put aside our partisan differences, roll up our sleeves, and get the work of righting education funding done. We now have the best chance we've had in a generation to do this, a chance to ensure that our state continues to be a leader in education in the nation. We stand ready to assist both you and the Governor in this critical work.