Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

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Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

February 28, 2007

SB 1114 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) appreciates the opportunity to offer our comments on the education funding bill today.

SB 1114, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education, contains a strong commitment by the state to public education funding. CABE supports the numerous provisions of this bill which reflect the recommendations of the Governor's Commission on Education Finance:

- Increase in the foundation level to $9,687 per student, phased in over 5 years
- Eliminate the cap on the education cost sharing grant
- Fully fund the special education excess cost grant for costs that exceeds 4.5 times the average per pupil expenditure
- Increase the per student subsidy and transportation grants for the Open Choice Program

Unfortunately, despite language in the Governor's Budget Summary indicating that municipalities would have to increase education budgets by the amount of additional ECS aid, that language is not contained in the bill before you. It is imperative that such language be included in order to insure that the additional state resources benefit public education.

There are several aspects of the bill which do require further consideration. It is imperative that resources be made available to the State Board of Education so that they have the staff to assist districts who are not making adequate yearly progress.

CABE opposes the provisions to reduce the school construction sliding scale reimbursement to 15 to 65%, and cap the annual grant commitment at $300 million, which will unfairly impact those school districts about to undertake necessary school construction projects. CABE strongly urges the legislature to consider this proposal in the context of long overdue changes to Connecticut's prevailing wage statutes. Increasing thresholds and reducing unnecessary paperwork will serve to reduce the cost for all bonded public projects in Connecticut. In addition, this proposal is incompatible with the provision to allow the State Department of Education to require some districts to implement all day kindergarten, for which space is the major constraint.

The proposal to require a high school exit exam also needs further study. We are currently compiling data from around the country, as well as from Connecticut's school districts, to assess the current status of exams and alternative measures of achievement as part of high school graduation requirements. It is imperative that we not take actions that will exacerbate the existing high school dropout problem.

CABE also opposes about the provisions which would allow parents to select magnet school programs on a space available basis, regardless of resources available in the local district budget to support such programs. Magnet schools have been created as voluntary options for local school districts. This proposal fundamentally changes the nature of those programs, and may require districts to reduce opportunities for the majority of students who choose to remain in their traditional public school, in order to support magnet school programs. If unanticipated mandatory expenditures arise during a budget year, funds must be found from the budget at the expense of some other planned expenditure, since local districts are prohibited from running deficits. We oppose SB 1205, which contains the same provision.

We appreciate your attention to these issues.