



Testimony
Bart Russell
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Education Committee
March 9, 2009

Re: SB-830, An Act Concerning the Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) applauds Governor M. Jodi Rell's efforts to craft a budget that continues her commitment to education funding for our towns and cities.

Meeting their obligation to provide quality education to students is a top priority for Connecticut's small towns and cities. The Governor's budget recognizes that inadequate education funding would simply shift the state's fiscal burden onto the backs of property taxpayers. Connecticut's small towns and cities are facing a brutal budget year and significant cuts in state aid to education would have been a crushing blow.

COST also supports the provisions in the bill which would delay implementation of the In-School Suspension mandate, which would impose costs on towns by requiring additional space and staff under some circumstances. Towns should have the flexibility to tailor policies governing school discipline to the needs of their students and community.

We are concerned, however, that the proposal caps reimbursement for several critical programs, including special education, health services, transportation, adult education, school readiness, minority recruitment magnet schools, charter schools, and bilingual education. Although we understand that the state is facing unprecedented fiscal challenges, capping these reimbursements shifts responsibility for such funding to the towns, which are already strapped financially.

Special education, in particular, continues to grow at an exponential rate and places an untenable fiscal burden on many towns. Moreover, from year to year, a school district's costs for special education can vary dramatically and are difficult to plan and budget for. The Special Education Excess Cost Grant was designed to reduce a town's exposure to significant and unexpected special education costs. Under current law, a district is eligible for a grant for the costs associated with children whose cost of special education, related services and room and board exceed 4.5 times the previous year's Net Current Expenditures per Pupil (NCEP). **COST opposes any effort to cap reimbursement for these costs.**

*COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns. More information is available at:
<http://www.ctcost.org/index.htm> or 860-676-0770.*