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Testimony of
Phil Apruzzese, President
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Before the
Appropriations Committee
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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mark Waxenberg and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association, representing more than 41,000 teachers in the state of Connecticut.

In this time of crisis, we are concerned that effective educational programs, created painstakingly over many years, will be dismantled. We are concerned that Connecticut's students will lose years of educational experiences that we won't be able to make up when times get better. We are further concerned that the state will fail to meet its constitutional obligation to provide all of Connecticut's students with a suitable educational opportunity.

Topping the list of concerns is our concern about the governor's reliance on federal funds merely to stay even with this year's funding level of $1.889 billion. To hold Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants to cities and town's at this year's level, the governor relied in large measure on the fiscal stimulus legislation before Congress. It contains direct aid to states to fund school funding formulas and take some of the pressure off state budgets. However, if it is used simply to shift costs from the state to the federal government, school revenues will be jeopardized when the federal funds dry up two years from now. There is no counting on continued fiscal support from Washington. There is no betting on an improved state economy. What happens at the end of the biennium? Will vital school funding in Connecticut be a house of cards that will simply collapse?

If the final stimulus package is smaller than the package envisioned by the governor when the budget was put together (and the Senate version indicates that this could be the case), education funding could become vulnerable as early as next year.

Level funding may sound acceptable to many in this room, but let's be honest with ourselves. It is really a cut. A zero increase in Education Cost Sharing grants assumes that schools can maintain existing programs and services with level ECS funding in each of the next two years. *This is a false assumption.* Standards have never been higher for our students. Meeting those standards and helping all students develop 21st century skills require resources, reasonable class sizes, and high quality teachers. All these cost money. A zero increase is a real cut in education services.

Given our state's longstanding commitment to a 50 percent share of total education costs and recognizing our state's constitutional obligation to provide a suitable educational opportunity for every student, it is reasonable to expect a modest increase in ECS – perhaps $65 million in each year of the biennium. The governor did not provide that increase. Given inflationary demands that are real, this situation creates a funding hole of about $130 million (even if funding remains level) – a deep hole that the governor leaves to local taxpayers with no choice but to raise local taxes or make deep cuts in local school operations.

This situation is further complicated by deep programmatic cuts, largely in the State Department of Education budget, presented by Governor Rell. We are deeply concerned about how these will translate into lost educational opportunities in classrooms across our state. Today time only permits us to address two programs: funding for the Teachers' Standards Implementation Program and funding for CommPACT schools. Both have been eliminated in the governor's budget.

The teachers standards program was expected to fund the Mentor Assistance Program (MAP), designed as a result of legislation stemming from a report written last year by the Program Review and Investigations Committee about BEST. MAP would be crucial to the success of the thousands of new teachers who enter the teaching profession each year. It is designed to provide intensive support to new teachers during the first two years of their careers as they learn the culture of their schools and districts, and begin to put into practice the skills they learned as pre-service teachers. This program provides concrete tools that will help teachers in all districts become more effective in the classroom in a shorter period of time.

The latest research indicates that intense mentoring over the first two years of a teacher's career yields the following results: (1) a teacher gains knowledge and skill equivalent to that of a fourth-year teacher; (2) the growth and achievement of students of new teachers equals that of students of experienced teachers; (3) teacher retention is higher; and (4) for every dollar invested in mentoring new teachers, there is a return after 5 years of $1.88 for the district and $1.66 for society in general.

Almost 50% of new teachers leave the profession after only 5 years of service, and in some urban districts in CT, the rate is higher. One of the primary reasons they leave is lack of support on the district level, despite the fact that they face greater challenges than they were prepared for. The most effective way to help new teachers is through the proposed Mentor Assistance Program, but it cannot be implemented if the state expects districts to pay for it without providing state funding.

We get what we pay for. If we want to attract and retain high-quality teachers, and provide the best education possible for all children in CT, we must provide a strong, state-funded mentoring program for our new teachers.

Finally, I want to make an urgent plea to retain funding for the the CommPACT school reform program that is off to an encouraging start as it tackles one of the nation's most urgent educational problems. Funded last year for the first time, the program has sparked a series of early improvements at eight schools in the state's largest and poorest cities. Also, it has already generated pledges of more than $1.5 million in private support.

The CommPACT program is a radical departure from the top-down operations common to most school systems. Instead of following the blueprint of a centralized bureaucracy or operating under the limits of union rules, schools are given a degree of independence similar to that of charter schools. However, unlike charter schools, where students volunteer to attend, CommPACT schools consist of students already enrolled in regular

public schools. These schools include Bridgeport's Barnum School and Longfellow School; Hartford's M.D. Fox; New Haven's Davis St. School and Hill Central School; New London, Shoreline Academy; and Waterbury's Washington Elementary School and West Side Middle School.

Connecticut's CommPACT school program is backed up by the research expertise of the University of Connecticut. UConn is a critical partner, as are the Connecticut Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut, the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents. We urge restoration of funding for this program. The CommPACT school coalition was requesting $500,000 in funding. We were frankly dismayed to see that the program was moved from the SDE to the SDHE with no funding requested or earmarked. We urge you to restore funding to make good on the investment that this legislature as well as private donors have already made in this program.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.