



**CGA Education Committee  
Public Hearing March 15, 2010**

**HB 5493, AAC Strategic Planning in State Education Policy and Charter School Funding  
HB5491 AAC Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut**

**HB 5489 AAC Secondary School Reform**

**Comments Submitted by Katherine Wilson, School Finance Specialist**

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.
- Distribute funds in a way that recognizes 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.
- Target additional funds toward improving academic achievement in communities with concentrations of disadvantaged children.

**Based on these broad principles, the League opposes HB 5493 because it would deduct state charter school tuition from sending districts' ECS grants.** The bill would require the state to pay tuition for each state charter school student equal to the net current expenditure per pupil of the student's home district. The state would deduct that tuition from the district's ECS grant, and even from its other state grants should its total tuition exceed its ECS. Though the bill appears to offer some reimbursement to districts for reduced ECS, that reimbursement is less than 100% and is provided only within available appropriations.

The ECS grant has always been underfunded, and during 2008-09 total state education grants accounted for only about 33% of local districts' combined net current expenditures, far below the 50% share supported by the League. By reducing ECS grants and making inadequate provision for reimbursement, HB 5493 would diminish the already insufficient funds provided to towns by the state for local public education. Furthermore, because charter school students tend to reside in Connecticut's least wealthy school districts—in 2008-09 78% of state charter school students came from our 31 poorest towns—HB 5493 would disproportionately affect many communities least able to pay. If this proposal had been in effect that year, tuition for Bridgeport's 1,026 charter school students would have totaled nearly \$13 million, or about 5% of its already strained budget. Tuition for the one charter school student from Greenwich would have been \$17,665, only about .01% of its lavish school budget. Other wealthy towns like Avon, Essex, Ridgefield, and Woodbridge had no charter school students that year and would not have been affected at all. Thus, HB 5493 would not only divert resources away from local public schools, it would unfairly divert them away from schools that need them most.

**The League also opposes HB 5491 because it requires local public school districts to establish expensive new programs, but makes no provision for additional funding.** For example, districts with dropout rates of 8% or higher would have to establish online credit recovery programs, and every school district in Connecticut would have to provide an advanced placement course program approved by the state. Whatever the merits of these particular programs, the League must object in principle to any new state mandate that places an additional burden on cash-strapped local school districts without any additional state contribution, particularly when the state's share of local education expenditures is already so inadequate.

**By the same token, the League cannot support HB 5489 because it does not make specific enough provision for grants to local and regional school districts to implement new high school graduation requirements.** The bill calls for implementation of the new requirements even if no federal funding to support them is obtained, beginning at the latest with the class of 2019, meaning that districts must be prepared to begin complying at the latest in the fall of 2015. Though Section 2 of the bill does require the State Department of Education to provide grants beginning in FY 2012 to support implementation, it specifies neither the amount of these grants, nor the criteria by which the amount of these grants is to be determined.