

Testimony of: David MacDonald

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Honorable Co-Chairs Harp and Walker, members of the committee, my name is David MacDonald and I am the Chair of the Board of Education for Hartford Public Schools. I'm here today to strongly oppose sections of **Proposed Bill No. 5117 — Concerning Portions of the State Budget Appropriating Aid to Municipalities** and **Raised Senate Bill No. 1121 — Concerning Establishing a Task Force to Study the Distribution of State Funds to Municipalities**. The language in these bills would allow a municipality to reduce their appropriation to its school district by an amount equal to \$3,000 per resident student if the resident student enrollment is lower than that of the previous year.

HPS fully supports and commends Governor Malloy's commitment to education funding and the request to Connecticut taxpayers for shared sacrifice. The Governor has also been very clear and vocal about the need to fix the education funding system in Connecticut. As such, a much needed MBR study and overhaul will be a critical part of the Governor's promised revamp of the Education Cost Sharing formula. HPS urges that the current MBR be continued and remain unchanged until the ECS has been revised and implemented to provide adequate and equitable education funding.

It is well-known that education funding throughout the State has remained flat, or in many cases has been reduced to pre-2009 levels, while costs have risen. To counter the negative effects of flat funding and increased costs, school districts throughout the State have found ways to make the delivery of instructional programs less costly, and in many cases eliminated programs altogether. All of this has occurred within the context of inadequate education funding at the state level. To ask that school districts reduce their budgets any further, while ignoring the systemic underfunding of education (which in Hartford we believe approaches \$20M), is a short-sighted and unfortunate distraction in the state with the highest achievement gap in the country.

Finally, the \$3,000 per pupil is an arbitrary number that does not reflect any fixed cost structure in our public schools. Indeed, though devastating to public schools, the property tax relief this would provide is likely to be immaterial to most municipalities. This appears to be a band-aid approach to much larger budgetary challenges. The practical reality is that the municipalities most likely to exercise the option to reduce their MBR would be those fiscally distressed municipalities whose school districts serve the state's highest-need, lowest-wealth, and lowest-achieving students. Hartford's students would be the biggest victims of this change, by far.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this important issue. Your prompt action in opposition to change to the MBR will be greatly appreciated.