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Testimony of

Ray Rossomando

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Education Committee

Re: **HB 6385 An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations
of the Governor Concerning Education**

February 23, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Legislative Coordinator for the Connecticut Education Association, representing 40,000 teachers across the state.

We testify today on *HB6385 An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education*.

HB6385 addresses numerous funding concerns, including the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, Governor Malloy's devolution of the State Vocational-Technical School system to local and regional authorities, and proration of various grants, such as statutory grants to cities and towns.

CEA congratulates the Governor for presenting a budget to the people of Connecticut that does not cut ECS funding. Governor Malloy's budget funds ECS at last year's level, which is a commendable accomplishment given the absence of federal funds infused two years ago. We urge this committee to support the Governor's goal of at least flat funding ECS.

As many know, flat funding does not keep pace with even modest increases in the costs of providing educational services. It should be noted then, that Teachers, like the many working people of Connecticut, have made sacrifices – over 1,000 teachers have been laid off. And, as the Governor did in his budget address, teachers have been doing their part to help control rising costs in their school districts. Over the past two-years, teachers in 81 districts have accepted salary freezes while digging deeper into their pockets to pay higher co-pays and an increasing share of rising insurance premiums (since 2005-06, premium shares for teacher groups

has increased from 12.2% to 16.4% – this is in addition to rising premium costs).

Connecticut's school districts have trimmed their budgets to bare minimum, resulting in larger classes with fewer resources. While we are grateful to the Governor for fulfilling his promise to level fund ECS, the challenge of fully funding and restoring equity to the ECS formula remains. To this end, we support the Governor's proposal to convene a Task Force to study the equalization grant formula and thank him for including CEA as a member.

We do remain concerned about the inadequacy of funding for Special Education services. Year-after-year, federal special education mandates remain drastically underfunded, amounting to a share of Connecticut's costs averaging around 7% a year. Historically, the state assumes only about 10% of the costs, leaving the remaining 83% to local taxpayers.

In recent years, the State's special education "Excess Cost" grant funding has been reduced on a pro-rata basis, exacerbating the mandate on cities and towns. Moreover, a reduction in the threshold for reimbursing towns enacted years ago remains unfunded, leaving municipalities with a greater share in the costs than was intended by the legislature. Unfortunately, the practices of underfunding the "Excess Cost" grant and delaying changes to the threshold continue in the Governor's proposed budget. For Connecticut to fully address equity and adequacy in the funding of its schools, it must also address the costs of delivering special education.

In closing, we would also like to comment on another aspect of Governor Malloy's proposed budget that is important to teachers. The Governor's budget fully funds Connecticut's pension and retiree health obligations. This is reassuring to CEA's members who, by law, are excluded from the Social Security retirement system and pay the full cost of retiree health insurance, reduced somewhat through contributions by active teachers and the State. In previous years, annual contributions to pension obligations have gone unmet, threatening the viability of post-retirement benefits and compromising the fiscal solvency of the state budget. By meeting this obligation, we avoid digging a deeper hole that could impact funding for ECS and other educational investments.

Thank you.