



Testimony
Bart Russell, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Education Committee
March 7, 2011

Re: OPPOSE - SB-1103, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *opposes* SB-1103, **An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education**, which would impose an unfunded mandate on Connecticut's towns and cities by requiring school districts to provide early childhood education. Although some funding is provided for this proposal, this bill will impose staggering costs on towns and cities in order to build and expand schools and classrooms, hire teachers, purchase supplies, etc.

Although we certainly support the goal of providing students with access to early childhood programs, Connecticut's small towns and cities are facing another brutal budget year and are struggling to adopt budgets that will continue to provide core academic programs for K-12 students. Additional unfunded mandates will negatively affect our ability to continue to provide quality education to these students.

Meaningful reform is needed to reduce the financial and administrative burden on small towns and cities. In addition to eliminating or delaying implementation of unfunded mandates such as the Minimum Budget Requirement, School Reform Mandates and the in-school suspension requirement, COST urges lawmakers to support binding arbitration reform.

An increasingly unmanageable portion of the local education budget is teachers' salaries and benefits. Unfortunately, under the current binding arbitration mandate, towns have very few options with which to negotiate any savings. In these difficult economic times, binding arbitration laws need some modifications, as follows:

- Give towns the right to reject arbitration awards by a 2/3 vote of a town's legislative body;
- Provide that a town's fund balance is not taken into consideration in determining binding arbitration awards;
- Require arbitrators to be AAA certified;
- Reducing the number of arbitrators from three to one.

If binding arbitration reform is adopted, districts may be successful in negotiating additional savings that could be targeted to strengthening academic programs.