



**CGA Education Committee
Public Hearing March 7, 2011
SB 1103 AAC Early Childhood Education
HB 6498 AAC School Districts
Comments Submitted by Katherine Wilson, School Finance Specialist**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to comment today on SB 1103 and HB 6498.

SB 1103 – The League believes that all levels of government share the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education and that programs such as early childhood education are among the measures that can be effective in helping children, particularly those at risk, reach their full academic potential. We therefore laud SB 1103's goal of making preschool available to every child in Connecticut. However, in the current fiscal environment we cannot support its requirement that every school district in the state offer such a program. While recognizing that Connecticut's existing patchwork of voluntary, often tuition-based public and private preschool programs does perpetuate inequality of educational opportunity based on economic status, we do not believe that placing a mandate on local districts and then heavily depending on private, perhaps temporary sources of funding to help support that mandate represents a fiscally sound remedy. Furthermore, even if the state were to propose funding from its own revenues a full 50% share of the statewide cost of universal preschool, we would question both the ability and the willingness of local property taxpayers to shoulder their share of such a large new program's cost at this time.

HB 6498 – The League fully supports delaying implementation of the costly mandates contained in PA 10-111. At the time of passage last year, the Office of Fiscal Analysis estimated its measurable ongoing price tag in the tens of millions annually, with many of its provisions generating significant staffing, program development, and space needs whose potentially large, additional costs could not be reliably determined. It was passed in the hope that the state would receive federal Race to the Top money to cover its costs, but with the denial of Connecticut's application, these now rest with the state and local school districts at a time when neither can afford them. We further support HB 6498's creation of a task force to examine issues related to the changes in high school graduation requirements, with the hope that less expensive, more flexible means can be found to accomplish the laudable goal of better preparing Connecticut's students for higher education and the twenty-first century workplace.

Thank you again for your consideration of our ideas on these important pieces of legislation.