STATE OF CONNECTICUT

GOVERNOR DANNEL P. MALLOY

Testimony of Dannel P. Malloy,
Governor of the State of Connecticut
to the Education Committee
on SB 24 – An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness
February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Giuliano and members of the Education Committee. I am proud to come before you today to testify on **Senate Bill 24, *An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness*.**

My administration, working with the General Assembly, including many of the legislators who sit on this very committee, has implemented some long-overdue initiatives over the last 14 months to help stabilize our state's finances and create jobs. Now, we must take on the next challenge – fixing what's broken in our public schools, so that we can work to build the economic revival Connecticut deserves.

There has never been a moment when jobs and education have been more connected and dependent on one another. For the sake of our state's economic competitiveness – if we are to continue to make strides and create jobs in this state, as we have over the last 14 months – it is imperative that we transform the public system in which our students learn and prepare for college and a career.

From personal experience, I know the impact a great public education can have, and I believe we have a responsibility to give the opportunity like the one I had to every child in our state.

In December and again just a few weeks ago in my State of the State address, I laid out six principles that are the foundation for the proposed legislation that is in front of you today; principles that were met with widespread support from individuals and organizations from across the spectrum. We need to:

- Increase access to high-quality early childhood education;
- Provide partnership, support and intensive interventions to turn around Connecticut's lowest performing schools and districts;

- Expand the availability to all types of high-quality school models;

- Foster innovation by removing red tape;

- Ensure Connecticut's teachers and principals are the very best, receive the right training, preparation and on-going professional supports within a fair personnel system based on effectiveness; and

- Target more resources to districts with the greatest need – tied to accountability and key reforms to foster student learning.

Today, I want to focus on three areas: lowest achieving schools, elimination of red tape and teacher talent.

I want to be blunt in talking about our lowest achieving schools. Forty percent of our students attend schools in our lowest performing districts. Our lowest performing students are not just low-performing compared to high achieving Connecticut students, but also when compared nationally. For years, we have thrown money at this problem without demanding accountability, and without getting the improvement that the situation demands. This must change. That is why I am proud of how we will be funding our schools conditionally in the alliance districts, to make sure they prove that every dollar that is provided to them comes with a plan in place and a path forward to execute a turnaround strategy to get students learning.

In the schools that are struggling the most, they must change too. Their past practices must be overhauled and transformed for their students to succeed. With appropriate direction, guidance and partnership from our rejuvenated Department of Education, these schools can turn around programs that fail to deliver positive results for students, parents and teachers.

But we cannot focus only on our lowest achieving schools. There must also be an effort to help our higher achieving schools too. We must do more, and for districts that are achieving that means getting out of the way. By removing red tape, we can unburden schools and districts and enable them to continually improve and reach new heights.

And while we work to raise student performance, we must also give our teachers and principals the opportunity to reach the top of their profession as well. Our teachers are working in challenging, often difficult environments. Their leadership in the classroom directly impacts our collective future. The package that I am asking you to support is founded first on providing teachers with the support – coaching and professional development – they need to be effective in the classroom. Today's current structures impede teachers' ability and time to raise student learning.

My vision is to train our teachers in the most effective way possible. We cannot afford for new teachers to face a steep learning curve when they enter the classroom; they must be the ones bending the curve when it comes to increasing student success in the classroom – in particular,

in our lowest achieving and most challenging districts. That is why I am proposing we raise the quality of teacher preparation programs and invest in teacher recruitment to attract the best and the brightest to enroll in our teacher prep programs.

However, teacher prep and recruitment are only part of the solution. We have an obligation to make teacher professional development truly supportive and helpful. Everyone has heard that the current Continuing Education Units (or CEU system) is ineffective to actual teacher development, so we have proposed a complete overhaul of CEUs. I know teachers want to teach, and they want to teach well. That is why we will re-focus professional development to provide the support and partnership teachers need to improve their classroom practice based on the results of the new evaluation system.

I opened the conversation of reforming teacher tenure two weeks ago, and I want to say again that we are fortunate to have many good teachers in our state. My belief that we need to reform teacher tenure is in no way a slight to those good teachers. As I have said many times, I would not be here today without the work of dedicated teachers.

I believe we now have the foundation for fair and productive teacher evaluations that will give us the tools to tackle this problem. Just last month, the legislatively-created Performance Evaluation Advisory Council – which included representation from AFT and CEA – reached consensus for a landmark agreement to implement a new teaching evaluation system that has since been adopted by the state Board of Education. Two weeks ago, the PEAC came to another landmark agreement for principal evaluation. This result of the inclusive PEAC process is the foundation for my proposal to transform the current rigid, red tape morass to a fair, performance-based system of evaluation, certification and tenure. Taken together, they will ensure that we have a system in place that justly rewards the many hardworking and dedicated public school teachers, while at the same time giving us the tools to help the few that are falling behind.

Thirty-one states have tackled the tenure question since 2009. States like Louisiana, Delaware, Illinois and Tennessee have striven to turn around lowest performing schools. And, we've incorporated best practices into this legislation. In order for Connecticut to regain its competitive edge, we must take action and understand how we compare to other states.

Last October, we completed a jobs special session – a session that was unparalleled across the country in terms of its substance and bipartisanship. I ask that we do that once more. There is no cornering the market on Democratic ideas and Republican ideas; we must pursue the best ideas for Connecticut.

Our public schools once led the nation, and now Connecticut leads in achievement gaps. Education is the civil rights issue of our time. This is our opportunity. The time is now to transform the status quo. We must provide our children with the opportunities they so richly deserve if we are to revive our state's economy and lead the country once more.

Thank you all, and I look forward to taking your questions and working with you to move this proposal forward.

###