TO: Members of the Connecticut General Assembly DATE: February 20, 2012
FROM: Steven A. Colarossi, Member of the Norwalk Board of Education

RE: Opposition to Education Cost Sharing Formula set forth in Governor's Bill No. 24

My name is Steven Colarossi. Since 2009, I have served as a member of Norwalk's Board of Education and presently sit as Chairperson of our Board's Finance Committee. Norwalk's residents are struggling to honor our community's historic support of our students while turning over larger and larger portions of their paychecks to the State of Connecticut for the increased taxes and fees we have all been charged. Yet, despite over 40% of our children qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch, the ECS formula considers Norwalk a "wealthy" town undeserving of a fair share of state aid to education.

Although other Norwalk citizens and officials have, and will testify to these facts, it bears repeating that Norwalk is Connecticut's sixth largest city, yet, historically, 37 smaller towns have consistently received more ECS funding. Some examples of this inequity are particularly glaring—such as Milford, with approximately 10% fewer students receiving 500% more in ECS aid.

The proposed modifications of the ECS formula set forth in Governor's Bill No. 24 do nothing to correct these inequities and, in fact, perpetuate the unfairness of the formula.

Under the revised formula, a town's target aid is the sum of two products which utilize a measure of the number of students in a town's school system. However, the measure of "total need students" is not a simple count of the number of students in a school district. Rather, it adds to the total number of students a lodestar which is a percentage of the total number of students from families at the poverty level. Unfortunately, towns in which there are large numbers of working poor have student populations where significant numbers of children are considered "at risk". It is not simply "poverty" (based upon federal census guidelines) that puts a child at risk educationally. Rather, the children of the working poor also require particular interventions for several reasons—whether they are the children of single-parent families, or the children of parents working two or three jobs , many of these children need and deserve before and after school care, assistance in developing expansive vocabularies in early-childhood education programs and a strong safety net to supplement the strained resources of their families. Yet, many of the working poor (just like many of the more than 40% of Norwalk's students who are on Free and Reduced Lunch) would not meet the definition of living in "poverty". Despite requiring (and deserving) the same level of services as those afforded children living in "poverty", these children if they live in Norwalk, would not receive the same level of state assistance.

Norwalk's children of working poor families are every bit deserving of state assistance as children of struggling families in the more than forty cities and towns which receive more ECS funding.

The calculation of "total need students" is, however, only one deficiency with the amended ECS formula, but it is perhaps the single most glaring example of how the amended ECS formula penalizes Norwalk's students. The formula is also flawed because it continues to use "median" income; the "median" income level rewards communities of relatively little economic diversity by treating them the same as a community like Norwalk in which there is a wide range of family income levels. Furthermore, because the formula is not being completely revised, the use of a measure of base aid (which has been calculated using the old formula) as a factor in each product perpetuates the past inequity of the ECS formula.

In conclusion, the ECS formula is unfair to the City of Norwalk and provides far fewer resources to the children of our working poor families—yet Norwalk's at-risk children are every bit as deserving as children in other cities and towns to receive a fair share of state education funding. For these reasons, I urge you to reject the current bill and work on revising an ECS formula that will benefit all at-risk children in Connecticut.