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Senator Andrea Stillman, Co-Chair
Representative Andrew Fleischmann, Co-Chair

Testimony on SB 24, An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit comments on SB 24, An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness.

My name is William F. Brennan, and I have been the First Selectman of the Town of Wilton since 2006. I am also a former Chairman of the Town's Board of Finance.

Wilton has one of the consistently best performing school districts in the state. Its budget, which represents about 70% of the town's total annual budget, is financed primarily by property taxes. While our education budget for FY 2012 is about \$72.8 million, the Town's ECS allocation for FY 2012 is about \$1.6 million.

Despite concerted efforts to cut and contain costs severely over the past several years, and particularly since the downturn in the economy, our education budget has increased each year just to accommodate rises in costs for non-academic items like insurance and fuel, in addition to contractual employee obligations, and we expect that it will not decrease in the coming years. Growth in our grand list, however, has slowed dramatically, the personal financial circumstances of our residents have worsened significantly, and we expect the Town's ability to raise local taxes to be very limited for the foreseeable future.

This has implications for the quality of our school system. While we are proud of its results today, our schools must continue to develop and improve. We must make investments in technology, facilities, and professional development. And we must do everything we can to ensure that our teachers and administrators have the time and resources they need to devote their talents to making sure our students learn.

SB 24 indefinitely maintains Wilton's ECS allocation at its 2012 level. As it represents such a small portion of our education budget now, this isn't the biggest problem, but this provision does seem to eliminate the possibility that Wilton will ever receive more if the formula is ever fully funded. That said, if districts like ours can't expect higher funding, I believe there is something that would even more effectively enable our professionals to devote more time and resources to educating our students, and that is **mandate relief**.

While SB 24 is aimed primarily at correcting deficiencies in low-performing districts, it will add significantly to reporting and evaluation requirements in districts like Wilton's. These new requirements may help us improve, but I suggest that they also provide an occasion for allowing the districts with ECS funding that is capped for the future, to forego many of the mandates that have been imposed on us in the past. I firmly believe that if a district has been succeeding consistently, the best thing is to allow it to continue to do what it does best.

Outcomes of recent meetings with superintendents and Board of Education members from districts similar to Wilton's lead me to believe that **mandate relief** would help all of us spend our education dollars more efficiently and would ultimately foster continuous improvement at our schools. I respectfully urge you to consider including a provision on **mandate relief** for high-performing districts in SB 24.

Sincerely,



William F. Brennan
First Selectman
Town of Wilton, CT