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Good afternoon Chairpersons Stillman and Fleishmann, Ranking Members Boucher and Giuliano, and Members of the Education Committee. I am here to testify on Raised Bill 24, *An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness*.

On behalf of the House Republican Caucus, I would like to thank the Education Committee for raising the Governor's bill that proposes many changes to the state's education system that this Committee and the legislature have been discussing for a long time. I'm heartened by the fact this year could be the year the legislature and the executive branch actually takes some real action.

Hopefully this bill will act as the framework from which we all can work together to come up with a compromise that will make real changes to enhance our education system and provide the best educational opportunities for our students. While we support many of the proposals set forth in the bill, we believe we cannot ignore our current fiscal environment and provide a false promise to allocate new spending toward any programs, education related or other if we truly can't afford it. We believe we should be reviewing our current education funding and reallocate these resources to support any new initiatives.

Today, I would like to address three specific proposals that the House Republican Caucus has proposed that are aligned with proposals offered in Bill 24 including: Expanding Summer Bridge Programs, Parental and School Choice, and Unfunded Education Mandates.

First, successful Summer Bridge programs currently exist throughout the state, including Fairfield and New Haven County, and are fully funded by private businesses with the support of private colleges and universities. These programs provide intensive support to students during the summer months and during the school year by way of tutoring, summer activities, and support in ways that cannot be calculated. We would like the Committee to consider including our proposal to offer tax credits to private businesses and entities that participate financially in Summer Bridge programs. These programs have a proven success rate, without the need for state funding or being bound by red tape often found in state bureaucracy.

No parent should be forced to keep their child in a failing school. Our proposal is to expand school choice options for parents by allowing them to take their child out of a failing school and enroll them in a magnet or charter school. If no slots are available in a magnet or charter, parents may receive a voucher to send their child to a private school of their choice. Every child deserves a supportive and

nurturing educational environment, and we should not prevent any student from receiving one. Additionally, under a separate plan, the State Department of Education should be tasked with identifying five failing schools, and convert them into a charter school model. In the future, the state should build upon this model with the intent of providing all students with a quality education and a school that will not fail them.

We cannot continue to overlook the onerous and time-consuming unfunded education mandates that have been imposed on our cities and towns. We hope that the Committee will consider reviewing all unfunded education mandates, and once the review is complete, see that some are repealed, or at the very least, a moratorium is placed on as many mandates as possible. Regardless of whether the mandate carries a cost, some of them carry such a time burden that educators are spending more time trying to comply with the mandates than they are teaching in the classroom. A complete review and evaluation, with the possibility of repeal or delay of unfunded education mandates will allow our schools and educators more time and flexibility to devote to our students and their success.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address a major concern that is shared among members of the House Republicans with regard to Section 11 of the bill. Upon careful inspection of Section 11, it appears that several small towns in Connecticut will be penalized for spending their own dollars on education. According to the bill, thirty-one towns will be docked thousands of dollars by the State of Connecticut, simply for choosing to spend more on their students than the state average per pupil cost. In essence, we view this as forced regionalization, and strongly oppose this concept. We hope the committee will re-consider its inclusion in the final piece of legislation.

Finally, our caucus has some concerns with the Governor's proposed changes to the ECS formula. First, there is some confusion about the measure used to determine the number of "Need Students". The bill defines a "Need Student" as a student between the ages of 5 through 17 years old, who live in a family with an income less than 185% of the federal poverty level. However, it's my understanding that the town run that most of us have seen includes ALL children in that income range, even if they are under five years old. We are also concerned that there are 33 towns that will never see an increase in their ECS allocation as result of removing the safeguard known as that Minimum Base Aid Ratio. Yes, these are wealthier towns – the same ones that pay an extremely large percentage of our state's income tax. We recognize that there are cities that need the more money than wealthy towns, but permanently freezing grants at today's levels for ANY town is simply not fair. I am also confused by the increase in the foundation, which is the component that drives money into the formula. I have yet to see the mathematical formula, so I don't know if there are changes in calculations that might be objectionable.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these important issues. Our caucus stands ready to work with members of the Committee, the Governor, and the legislature as these important proposals that affect our students move forward through the legislative process.