



**CGA Education Committee**  
**Public Hearing February 15, 2013**  
**HB 6357 AA Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning**  
**Education**  
**Comments Submitted by Katherine Wilson, School Finance Specialist**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to comment today on the governor's budget recommendations concerning education. We have thoughts in three specific areas.

**Changes to the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Formula** – The League believes the state should provide 50% of the overall statewide cost of local elementary and secondary education through grants to towns. Because the state share currently falls well below that 50% mark, we welcome any increase in this grant, which provides the bulk of state aid to local public education. While we also support some of the proposed conceptual changes to the ECS formula, we cannot endorse many of its quantitative elements because they were artificially derived in order to produce a total equal to that produced by the current formula, i.e. \$2.64 billion. The ECS Task Force itself admits in its final report that its recommended formula, identical to that contained in this bill, “should not be considered a specific recommendation,” but rather a “model” intended to “provide a comparison of the current law fully funded target to the Task Force recommendation.” We believe that the ECS formula should be based on real costs and real needs, not on a predetermined bottom line, and that it should equalize each town's ability to finance school programs at the Foundation level with a comparable tax effort. More specifically...

- While we support raising the Foundation, the proposed \$11,754 is too low based on state average per pupil costs of \$13,991 in 2011 and, furthermore, we believe that this amount was arrived at arbitrarily in order to produce the predetermined total noted above. The Foundation has previously been based on 80<sup>th</sup> percentile spending three years prior, and we would support continuing on that basis. We would also like to see the methodology for calculating the Foundation encoded in statute.
- We support measuring student poverty on the basis of eligibility for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), as long as that data can be adequately verified, but we question the .30 additional weighting for FRPL students because it appears to have been determined without any supporting evidence as to its validity. We also object to the elimination of the .15 additional weighting for English Language Learners in the belief that such students also require additional educational resources. We think the state should seek to better quantify the additional levels of resources required to educate various categories of students.
- We support using Median Household Income as the sole income measure because it can be updated annually and best reflects the economic condition of a community's residents. However, we object to the “Median household income adjustment factor” because we believe it was created solely to produce a predetermined end result. We object to the “Equalized net grand list adjustment factor” for the same reason.
- We support changing the Minimum Aid Ratio to 10% for Alliance Districts, 2% for all others, in the belief that every town should receive some minimum of aid and that it is appropriate for

low-performing districts to have a higher floor in order to enhance their efforts to improve student achievement.

- Though we do not in general support a stop-loss provision for the ECS formula, given the current level of underfunding we do not object to the provision in this bill.

**Elimination of the Public School Pupil Transportation Grant** – We strenuously object to the elimination of this significant grant, which will disproportionately affect districts that must transport large percentages of their student population. It seems particularly unfair to abolish this grant when the grant supporting transportation of non-public school students remains intact. We are concerned that the municipal “Hold Harmless Grant,” though it may offset reductions in this and other municipal grants for this budget cycle, will not long endure and that towns will be forced into increased dependence on regressive local property taxes as a result.

**Transfer of the PILOT Grant (State-Owned Property) to the ECS Line** – We do not support incorporating the PILOT grant into the ECS line item in the budget. We believe that, as with the Charter School grant, such a practice reduces transparency, diminishes accountability, and represents poor accounting practice.

Thank you for allowing us to share our ideas with you today on this important legislation.