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Ray Rossomando
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*Before the
Education Committee*

**Re: Governor's Bill 6357 AA Implementing the Budget
Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education**

February 15, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Stallman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 members who are active and retired teachers across the state. I am testifying today on Governor Malloy's budget proposals affecting education.

We testify today on portions of HB 6357 AA Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education. The Governor's bill implements changes to the ECS formula, transportation funding, and addresses other grants for education.

ECS

As a previous analysis by CEA showed, the persistent underfunding of the ECS formula has disproportionately impacted lower wealth districts. This is particularly true when you compare the current distribution to a distribution more similar to that envisioned at the inception of the ECS formula years ago. Many advocates for public education have called for increased funding and changes to the formula that would tilt the balance back to a more equitable distribution. The Governor's proposal does meet this goal and for that we support the proposed changes.

But, there is more work to be done. As many know, the ECS formula is essentially a product of three core factors: student enrollment weighted for measures of student educational needs (e.g. "poverty"), the foundation cost of a suitable education, and a percentage of the foundation that accounts for each town's capacity to raise revenue from property wealth.

The Governor's bill changes the measure of child poverty from Title 1 and ELL counts to Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (and milk). Title 1 significantly underestimates poverty resulting in a disproportionate and negative impact on less wealthy towns.

Estimating child poverty is critical to identifying districts where more resources are necessary to address the achievement gap. Children coming to school from homes with lesser means often lack access to books, camps, travel outside of their own town, and other factors that give peers from wealthier families a more effective context for learning and making sense of new information. This unequal level of opportunities and experiences is a significant factor deepening the achievement gap.

Targeting funding to address the unequal playing field associated with poverty is critical to closing this gap.

While there is no perfect measure of child poverty, the Governor's proposal vastly improves upon the use of Title 1. And, while there is a correlation between Free and Reduced Priced Lunch and the concentration of ELL students, they are not one in the same. CEA believes more work has to be done to ensure that the ECS formula appropriately accounts for the unique challenges facing ELL students and achievement gaps that persist due to language barriers.

Regarding the foundation level in the formula, we are pleased to see that the Governor has proposed that the foundation level increase to \$11,750. However, the foundation should be tied to the real costs to districts for providing a suitable education as those costs change with time. We urge lawmakers to further consider a study of the costs of providing a suitable education and link such costs to changes over time.

The Governor's proposal also seeks to change the relationship between household income and property wealth in determining each town's ability to pay. At this juncture, we reserve judgment on the overall impact of this proposed change as it awaits further analysis.

Other Funding

The Governor's proposal also includes many changes municipal grants. Some of these changes are specifically education-related and are contained in the bill before you. The proposal to replace \$80 million a year in school transportation funds with a \$5 million competitive grant is one example. But more concerning is the totality of changes in municipal funding as they impact local schools.

The most significant change to local funding is not the amount of statutory grants to cities and towns, but in the strings attached. Some funds formerly deposited into local general funds are now restricted by virtue of being converted to bond funds. Such funds, along with ECS and other statutory grants are all in the same fiscal pot. However, a smaller share of that pot would be discretionary. As a result, we anticipate greater tension between boards of education and municipal leaders due to greater competition increasingly limited resources. This could result in significant constraints on resources available to local authorities to fairly fund our schools.

We urge lawmakers reject proposals that decrease resources available for critical municipal services, especially education.

Thank you.