

From: Paul Graseck, Superintendent of Schools, Hampton, Connecticut
Sent: Friday, March 14, 2014
To: Education Committee
Subject: Public Hearing Testimony – HB 5565
An Act Concerning the Minimum Budget Requirement

Thank you Chair Fleischmann and Chair Stillman and members of the Education Committee for holding hearings on House Bill 5565. I am Paul Graseck, Superintendent of Schools in Hampton, CT, and I support this bill.

Connecticut law requires that all school districts budget each year at least the amount in local funds they budgeted in the previous year. This “Minimum Budget Requirement” was established to protect districts from drastic reductions in any given budget cycle, guaranteeing a measure of district stability over time. That’s the intent.

As the law is currently written, however, a town that sends students to two districts can find that an increase in one budget can be offset by a comparable decrease in the other and still meet the MBR. This was the situation in Hampton this fiscal year when the elementary school budget was decreased by a whopping 5.5%, technically permissible because of an increase in Hampton’s appropriation to the regional district budget.

In 2013-14, Hampton’s contribution to the RD11 budget (our regional high school, hence a separate district) increased substantially and was approved by the sending towns. Then Hampton alone took up the question of its elementary school district budget.

Because the town chose to calculate the MBR based on town rather than district – allowable under current law – it was possible to approve a budget for the elementary school district significantly below the previous year’s budget. The result: A 5.5% decrease in the elementary school budget – despite the usual increases in expenses due to negotiated teacher raises and a range of other increases.

This wrinkle in MBR law runs counter to the spirit of MBR, which was designed to protect districts from devastating budget reductions.

Hampton Elementary School District has endured two years of 0% increase budgets followed this current year by a 5.5% decrease. This budget decrease is the largest decrease in the state, more than seven times higher than any other. It forced many difficult cuts in direct services to students, some of which were restored on a temporary basis by individual donations from the community. However, this is no way to fund a public school system and such donations cannot be expected to continue. The proposed MBR legislation:

1. requires that each school district **not be linked** to any other school district when a town calculates how much it must appropriate to a district to meet the MBR
and
2. restores the MBR for Hampton School District to the 2012-13 level. If this is not done, the MBR in Hampton is reset going forward at a level 5.5% below FY13, losing ground each year as costs increase.

The proposed revisions to the MBR law are targeted (1) to avoid such cuts for any district in this situation in the future **and** (2) to rectify the debilitating situation in the Hampton School District.

I support this bill. It acknowledges the spirit in which the MBR law was originally conceived **and** it closes a key loophole that runs counter to the purpose of MBR legislation.

Thank you.