

TESTIMONY OF THE  
CONNECTICUT COALITION  
FOR ***JUSTICE***  
IN EDUCATION FUNDING  
TO THE  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 17, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and esteemed members of the Education Committee: The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding appreciates this opportunity to submit comments pertinent to **Raised Bills No. 476 and 5562**.

**Raised Bill No. 476 — An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap**

With reference to Sec. 2, the extension of time from 30 months to 60 months for eligible students to spend in bilingual education programs is one very positive step forward in supporting the language acquisition needs of English-language learners so that they can better realize academic progress upon transitioning out to regular education programs. The 60 months is more in line with ELL research into best practices than is the current 30-month limitation on such services.

However, this very positive step forward appears not to be accompanied by any funding. As such, it would constitute still another unfunded education mandate and one that would fall disproportionately heavily on the dozen Alliance Districts in which about 70 percent of all such children reside.

The unfunded nature of this proposal is especially vexing in light of the 2013 revamp of the Education Cost Sharing formula, which eliminated any weighting to help cover the marginal costs of educating ELL students.

**Raised Bill No. 5562 — An Act Concerning Special Education**

Sec. 3 attempts to tackle the long-standing fiscal nightmare that every school district in Connecticut faces: the underfunding of special education by both the state and federal governments.

Unfortunately, the proposed 3-tiered reimbursement scheme is neither an adequate nor equitable solution to the funding problem. The bill makes no mention of lifting the cap that's been in place for several years on the special education excess cost grant, and specific note is made of reimbursements being "within available appropriations."

A tiered system, wherein submitted costs could be below the current reimbursement threshold of 4.5 times a district's average expenditure for regular program students, would trigger many more requests for reimbursements — and precisely at a time when SPED service costs are increasing at about twice the rate of other school costs and the numbers of children who require very high-cost services are growing.

Holding the frozen and far-too-small reimbursement “pie” constant means that it would need to be sliced into many more pieces to accommodate the increase in reimbursement requests. That would result in smaller pieces for all. For the districts that educate the highest-cost SPED students, that would likely have an especially inequitable effect.

In FY13 Connecticut's public school districts spent some \$1.8 billion on SPED, representing 22% of total operating expenditures. Small wonder that the clamor is loud for the state to (a) substantially lower the reimbursement threshold and uncap the allocations, (b) assume direct fiscal responsibility for all SPED out-of-district costs and include ECS weights for students with mild and moderate disabilities, (c) assume direct fiscal responsibility for all SPED program costs, in and out of districts, or (d) devise some other adequate and equitable fiscal remedy that produces even greater savings to districts while also bolstering the quality of SPED services to children.

Respectfully submitted,

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*The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) is a broad-based coalition of municipalities, local boards of education, statewide professional education associations, unions, and other pro-education advocacy organizations, parents and schoolchildren aged 18 or older, and other concerned Connecticut taxpayers. Member communities are home to nearly half the state's public school students, including some three-fourths of all minority students, those from low-income families, and students from homes where English is not the primary language.*