

TO: Honorable Sen. Beth Bye and Rep. Toni Walker
And the Members of the Appropriations Committee
Testimony in FAVOR of SB816
An Act Establishing a Minimum Level of Funding Under the Education Cost Sharing Grant
Formula
Thursday, April 2, 2015

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

As a public school teacher with 43 years of service in Regional School District 17 (Haddam and Killingworth), as someone who has lived in these towns for 50 years, and currently, as someone who serves as the Vice-Chair of this Board of Education, I have experienced a half century of education involvement in both towns.

When the ECS Funding formula originated, its purpose was to assist towns with Horton-Meskill and to help with the financial responsibilities of the many unfunded mandates that followed. In reviewing the list of underfunded towns not reaching the target funding of 50%, it is apparent that the ECS Funding formula needs revision to be fair and equitable. The Legislature in 2015 has the opportunity to accomplish much by passing Senate Bill 816.

The town of Haddam has particular need of revision provided in this bill. It is funded at 41.38%. However, it has another burden. The Nuclear Atomic Plant was decommissioned in 2006. Though it has been taken off the Haddam Grand List, that adjustment has not been made regarding ECS funding. That's almost ten years of lost ECS funding.

The effect of the ECS underfunding for Haddam has been devastating:
the increased tax burden on seniors with fixed incomes,
poor real estate sales,
businesses not moving into town,
annual high property tax increases felt most by middle and low income residents,
a blaming of the schools for the tax increase and burden.

With 80% of the taxpayers' bill going to public education, our school board must find all possible savings. We have been able to adopt budgets well under the inflation rate for the last three years. This year we would have been at zero again except for three major budget drivers: increased energy costs, a health insurance year with serious claims, and higher costs for special education. The many mandates (especially the unfunded ones), the increased costs for educating 2200 students, the maintaining of our facilities-five buildings, are all responsibilities for Board of Education members that must be addressed. We need your help as a partner to maintain our excellent schools. We need fair and equitable ECS funding this year.

This situation cannot continue without severe repercussions in Haddam. Further cuts in the school budget would jeopardize our excellent schools and our students-future citizens. Adjusting Haddam's ECS funding by removing the Atomic Plant, promoting a state graduated income tax are ideas for the near future. But for now, make the ECS funding formula fair and equitable. SB 816 is that first step.

Sincerely,
Susan Dean
Vice-Chair, Regional School District 17 Board of Education
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