

TESTIMONY submitted to the APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE - April 2, 2015

SB 816 – AA ESTABLISHING A MINIMUM LEVEL OF FUNDING UNDER THE EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANT FORMULA.

Good Morning Senator Bye and Members of this Committee.

My name is Lydia Tedone and I am Chair of the Simsbury Board of Education. This is my second opportunity to testify regarding adequate education funding levels that affect school systems.

As one of the 19 districts funded below 50% - Simsbury's ECS is presently at 45.84%.

How is it equitable to underfund the children in 19 districts while overfunding those in 150 districts?

A minimum of a 50% level – would mean approximately - \$550,000 more dollars in Education Cost Sharing Aid to the Town of Simsbury's Board of Education.

Over the past 6 years, our average Board of Education budget increase has been 1.52% while, the ECS aid has increased at 0.82%. I would like to point out - our next year's budget will see a modest increase of 1.3%. The failure of appropriate state support has led to constraint budgets for our children.

Simsbury has struggled in the past few budget cycles – to constrain its' mill rate. The minimum level of proposed funding, would be of significant fairness to the children and taxpayers of Simsbury.

While Simsbury is not known for a growth in poverty, the fact is – that since the 2000-2001 school year, our district has seen an increase in the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunches, from 112 students to 406 today. This increase amounts to more than 260%.

I would like to make mention – that currently 9.5% of our students are eligible versus the 2.3% figure in 2000-2001. Some of this is related to the percentage increase of the number of Choice students we have accepted into our district.

In Simsbury, we are well aware of the state's fiscal constraints – we too realize this will be an extremely difficult budget year and appreciate any avoidance of making significant reductions that impact our public schools. A fair distribution of resources is mandatory to the equitable treatment of all children.

However, with that being said – we are in an era where local education costs continue to increase while the burden falls on local communities, such as mine, to make up for funding differences.

This is the time where we need the additional and appropriate investment. That is why I sit before you to advocate for stability and reliable funding. As a member of the Board of Education, we face the challenges of providing quality education to our students, while meeting the state mandates and being respectful of the local property taxpayers of my town. This is critical legislation for towns like mine, where our children are underfunded by over \$6,000,000.

I appreciate your ongoing support for the educational needs of our students, so we can continue to provide each and every child with an excellent education.

