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Bob Brown
Before the
Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee

April 15, 2015

Re: HB 7054 (Raised) An Act Concerning Keno

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger and members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee. My name is Bob Brown. I am a social studies teacher at Southington High School, where I have proudly taught for 41 years. I am also president of my local teachers' union, the Southington Education Association.

I am here today to testify on HB 7054 AAC Concerning Keno and the need to generate sufficient revenue to fund our schools. Southington is among the 119 underfunded towns that do not receive their full Education Cost Sharing rant. Southington is underfunded by \$8.5 million. I'd like to describe for you the impact locally of underfunding state funds to public education.

Southington is a wonderful town. I am blessed to teach many wonderful students. Southington is also a fiscally conservative town. Sadly, every year at this time, we must go through a local budget battle to garner sufficient funding to offer a quality education to all our young people. I believe we do offer a high- quality public education for all, but at a price. That battle has been especially tough the last ten years or so, due mostly to the recession. Unfortunately, as funding increases have slowed, so have our costs increased. Heath care costs for employees have skyrocketed. Special education demands have escalated, as more and more students are identified with special needs. New state and federal mandates such as Common Core, SBAC testing and the new teacher evaluation system have driven up the need to do more and more professional development training for teachers. As we try to meet the needs of an ever-changing demographic of students, their needs have increased, necessitating more and more special after school programs, things like a robotics team, STEM initiatives (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), sports for more who want to participate, reading and drama clubs, activities for students with special needs—the sports teams and drama activities for challenged students are wonderful--and so much more. Our jobs have become much more demanding than ever before.

As we battle locally for sufficient education funding, we are faced this year with the added threat of the state underfunding money sent to towns for education. My town is neither a wealthy suburb nor urban. We have our own unique budget challenges. Cutting funding will result in some of the following, depending on the amount of the cuts—

1. Classroom teachers will be cut. This will result in larger class sizes, and less ability for all teachers to individualize learning and match the needs of specific students.
2. Professional Development for teachers will be cut. As we cope with new mandates and changes—Common Core, SBAC testing, teacher evaluation demands, differentiated learning, and so much more, we need to train and keep all teachers updated on these changes. That takes time and money.
3. After school programs will be cut. Our robotics teams, STEM programs, sports at the sub-varsity and even some varsity levels, reading and drama programs, enrichment programs will all face the axe. So will extra activities for students with special needs. These are essential in an ever-changing world, one in which our schools are asked to take on more and more responsibility for all aspects of student lives.
4. Support staff cuts could happen. Not only paraprofessionals will be cut, but so will people we have put in place recently to help teach teachers and needy students new reading, math and science methods. Again, the world is changing, and demands on us are growing.
5. Technology faces potential cuts. The new SBAC testing, as well as other standardized testing, requires computers for everyone. So does the world our students operate in! We don't have them, and many computers we do have are outdated. How can we purchase them with budget cuts?

In closing, let me implore you to increase state funding for public education. Education is the most essential requirement of a competitive, democratic society. As global competition increases, sadly, as security issues increase, and as the needs of our students coping with our complex world increase, there is no better or more needed place to put public tax dollars than into public education. Our entire society benefits from better educated, healthier (physically, emotionally and mentally), productive students.

Thank you for listening. I would be glad to answer any questions.