

Shari Cantor Testimony
Education Committee public hearing 3/3/15

Hello my name is Shari Cantor. Thank you to the members of the Education Committee for allowing me to speak at this public hearing tonight. I am here to speak about the systemic underfunding of ECS in my community and many communities in the state of CT. It is unfortunate that this hearing was scheduled on a night many Boards of Education are meeting and are therefore not available to testify at this public hearing.

I am the Deputy Mayor for the Town of West Hartford and have been a member of the Council for more than 10 years. West Hartford is a wonderful place. It is where I grew up and where I chose to live and raise my family. It is perceived to be a wealthy community with great schools and a vibrant center and a good quality of life. This is only partially true. Our schools are successful because we have great administrators, teachers that are committed and have worked closely with the town during very difficult financial times and because our residents have invested through property taxes at an increasing rate to benefit our students but we are falling in our per pupil spending year after year. When I went to high school in the late 70's we had the highest per pupil spending in the State of CT. We now are 125 out of 169 towns. We have combined every administrative job on the Town side and the school side and sought every efficiency possible.

The reality is our success has prevented us from sharing in the state funding that we are entitled to. As you know ECS, Education Cost Sharing is the state's funding method for supporting public education in our town's public schools. This

year West Hartford is underfunded in ECS dollars by \$36 million dollars. This ranks us last in a gap of \$3,015 per student. The average gap is \$1,100 Since 2007 West Hartford's shortfall of ECS funding is \$301 million dollars. Let me repeat that \$301 million dollars.

The reason behind the disparity in funding is due to the migration of poverty. From 2000 to 2010 Poverty increased at a rate of 19% in the city of Hartford while the Hartford suburbs saw an increase in poverty by 62%. West Hartford's population below the poverty line has increased by 35% and free and reduced lunch meal price students have increased by 113% from 2000- 2013.

As an achieving school district West Hartford's huge funding gap has been ignored. Low achieving schools have warranted an increase in funding but West Hartford has been passed by year after year because it has been successful and our residents are picking up this increasing burden.

It is unfair for all of the residents of West Hartford to be by passed year after year. There are eight communities in the state that receive less than 40% of their ECS funding and 19 less than 50%. There are over 40 municipalities that receive over 100% of their ECS funding. Does this seem fair to you?? Not to me.

The ECS funding increase from 1996 to 2014 increased by 63.56% as opposed to Magnet schools at 1578.57% and Charter Schools at 1416.98% and Open Choice at 1366.03%. This is not the commitment to public education that I know the state wants and needs to make to each and every student. Let's be fair.

