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An affiliate of the  
National Education Association

*Testimony of*  
**Ray Rossomando**  
*Connecticut Education Association*  
*Before the*  
**Appropriations Committee**  
*April 2, 2015*

*Re:*

**SB 816 An Act Establishing a Minimum Level of Funding  
Under the Education Cost Sharing Grant Formula**

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando. I serve as research and policy specialist for the Connecticut Education Association. I also served on the Governor's Task Force on Education Finance and worked on Connecticut's education finance issues for 10 years as legislative staff.

**CEA testifies in support of SB816 An Act Establishing a Minimum Level of Funding Under the Education Cost Sharing Grant Formula.**

SB816 would ensure that no town receives less than 50% of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funds owed to them by the state. Although it would not solve underfunding for all 119 towns that do not receive what's owed to them as required by state law, passing this bill is a step forward toward fairly funding Connecticut schools.

The towns affected by this bill represent communities with a wide variety of characteristics; they are not all low-wealth towns, they are not all urban areas, they are not all suburban towns. But they are all significantly shortchanged by a formula that has already factored in town wealth, household income, and student needs. In the end, they are the most unfairly treated towns by the state's failure to meet its commitment to fully-fund ECS.

As a parent of a child attending a school in one of these towns, I observe some of these shortcomings first-hand. I am continually dismayed that supplies that were always available in my school growing up, are not readily available today. Underfunding has resulted in supply-drives to help schools collect pencils, markers, paper, and books. I've observed first-hand teachers reaching into their own pockets to purchase classroom materials, and in some cases snacks for needier children. Meanwhile class sizes exceed state averages in the early grades resulting in less personalized attention when students need it most.

As a taxpayer, what the state doesn't pay also impacts my family's budget. Persistent underfunding ultimately means that taxpayers are getting less for their money, paying more for services than they should, or some combination of paying more and getting less.

In West Hartford, the underfunding equates to about \$1,300 per year in property taxes for the median homeowner. In Wethersfield it amounts to about \$665 per year. The impact on Milford taxpayers is about \$527 and \$708 in Danbury. These costs represent real money to wage earners and real services to students.

SB 816 does not solve the state's persistent reluctance to fully fund Connecticut's schools. The state needs a stronger solution to guarantee its fiscal and constitutional commitment. The bill also does not improve the ECS formula, which still requires in its calculation a basic recognition of the actual costs of schooling on a per pupil basis. The current amount used in the formula (\$11,252) is arbitrary and significantly lower than the state average per pupil expenditure of \$15,729.

But what SB 816 does do is stop the bleeding for the towns most affected by the state's failed fiscal commitment. We support SB816 because it is part of the solution to fixing the state's commitment to fully fund the state's ECS grant.