

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 and Representative Walker:

I am writing in support of bill SB816 that supports equitable ECS funding. The town of Haddam is grossly underfunded because the ECS funding formula was not readjusted after the Yankee Power Plant was decommissioned in Haddam almost a decade ago.

As Chairman of the Region 17 Board of Education, I volunteer my time and work tirelessly to support a quality education, which is a Constitutional right, for the students of Haddam and Killingworth. As a Board of Education, it is our responsibility to adopt a school budget and strive to be efficient and responsible with taxpayer dollars. Over the last 3 years, we have managed to keep the school budget increase low, under the rate of inflation. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult. This year we have experienced 3 budget drivers that are out of our control: increased energy costs, health insurance (due to bad claims) and a rise in special education tuition, mandated by State Law. Even with flat budgets, the town of Haddam has difficulty passing the school budget due to the high taxes. Unfortunately, many in town "blame" the schools for the tax burden not realizing the many mandates and vast expenses associated with educating 2,200 students and maintaining 5 buildings. It is unfortunate that the ECS issue has put such encumbrance on Haddam residents.

The dilemma is that Haddam is underfunded by ECS by 42%! I fear that if Haddam's situation continues, the quality of our school system may be at risk. Haddam is only 1 or 19 towns that are funded below 50%. Of all 169 municipalities, we are the 10th most underfunded town. Please don't allow Haddam taxpayers to continue to choose between supporting education and offsetting their taxes. This will cause even bigger problems for Haddam in the long run.

Our Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Howard Thiery, will plan to testify in support of this bill on 4/2 on behalf of Region 17 and Haddam. SB816 is a first step in fixing the funding formula for all communities throughout the state but will most directly impact Haddam.

Sincerely,
Sue Twachtman
Chairman, Region 17 Board of Education