



TESTIMONY BY MAYOR MARCIA LECLERC, TOWN OF EAST HARTFORD

Appropriations Committee

April 1, 2015

SB 1116: [S.B. No. 1116](#) (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EXPENDITURES FOR THE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

Good morning Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Marcia Leclerc, Mayor of the Town of East Hartford. With me is Paul Mainuli, Business Service Director for East Hartford Public Schools.

Both Mr. Mainuli and I are here to ask you to amend SB 1116, an act concerning expenditures for the programs and services of the department of education. Before he presents the testimony and data to support such an amendment I want to share the foundational and census structure of my community and I hope that this information will provide a greater compelling framework of the unintended financial hardship my school districts and my community face in regards to the escalating tuition costs for district students attending magnet schools.

These statistics were compiled by the State's Office of Policy and Management or the Town's external actuaries.

- The Town's pension plan is funded at 58% with an unfunded pension liability totaling \$150 million
- The Town has an unfunded Other Post Employment Benefit liability of \$160 million
- The Town's per capita income at \$25,356 is 158th on the list of 169 municipalities which is 67.5% of the State average
- Our unemployment rate is 7.7% compared to the Statewide average of just over 7%
- We are ranked as the 11th highest community out of 169 municipalities "in need" when we talk about TANF (Town Aid to Needy Families)
- Our Per Pupil Education Expenditures are \$12,175 annually which ranks us 161st out of 169 towns and at \$12,175 is lower than the Statewide average by 19%
- I preside over the 5th highest equalized mill rate in the State and the 156th lowest per capita grand list out of 169 Connecticut Municipalities
- Our grand list has been stagnant for over a decade and its composition is 50% residential and 50% business so any tax increase discourages business from investing or reinvesting in my community

As the numbers plainly support, we are a community that has more needs than our ability to pay; first among them today is magnet school tuition.

With these statistics as a backdrop, East Hartford set its FY 16 budget on March 10th. That budget raised taxes by 1%, bringing our mill rate to 45.8 mills on a community that could scarcely afford higher taxation. Even with this tax increase, the Board of Education's request leaves them \$1.9 million short of funding what amounts to a "status quo" education budget.

As a community, we continue to have a vibrant and passionate discussion on how to advocate for our community, for our children, and for our taxpayers. We are grateful for the Alliance District designation which is vital to addressing the achievement gap in my community, but instead our community discussion, in light of the metrics I recited above, is how we will keep pace with even the baseline education costs!

The setting of the FY 16 budget immediately dovetails into our predicament related to magnet school tuition. As you know, magnet school tuition came about indirectly as part of the Sheff vs. O'Neil settlement. As much as the State's solution is another laudable goal, it has specific and distinct repercussions on my community. While I believe, the original intent of the solution was that no one community would be impacted by more than 5% of its students being enrolled in magnet schools, East Hartford stands at 18% with another magnet school expansion on the horizon.

As a result, the Board of Education pays \$3.1 million (2.7% of the annual operating budget) in tuition out of an already underfunded school budget. That's \$3.1 million not used to support the core education mission or existing infrastructure of our school system.

To those who suggest our costs are lower because of magnet schools are incorrect. While there may be some reductions in staffing, our overhead costs remain the same when students leave a neighborhood school and a far greater amount of financial resources in the form of magnet school tuition payments and transportation leaves the local school system with them.

For that reason, I ask for your support for a legislative remedy that caps the magnet school tuition payments a community like East Hartford must make.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Marcia Leclerc