



Testimony
Betsy Gara, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
Education Committee
March 11, 2015

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) appreciates the opportunity to comment in **support** of **SB-1056 – An Act Concerning the Excess Cost Threshold and the Collection of Data Relating to Per Pupil Costs for Special Education.**

Although we understand that the proposal falls short of addressing the pressing need to significantly increase special education funding, it represents a positive step in the right direction.

Connecticut is more reliant on property taxes to fund preK-12 public education than any other state in the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. For many years now, state aid to municipalities has been largely flat funded, putting enormous pressure on towns – and property taxpayers - to fund the delivery of critical services, including education. In fact, towns pick up more than 60% of special education costs, which are increasing by an alarming 5-6% each year.

Moreover, the costs associated with the provision of special education services are very unpredictable, creating difficulty in managing and budgeting costs at the local level. Connecticut needs to begin to address this issue to assist towns in meeting their obligation to provide *all* students with a quality education.

Phasing in reductions to the reimbursement threshold will help ensure that towns receive a greater percentage of special education funding. This will help stabilize special education costs, to some degree.

Although we recognize that the state is not in a financial position to significantly increase education funding at this time, **Connecticut must begin to develop a long range plan for phasing in increases to education funding, including special education, to provide adequate fair share funding for all towns.** As part of this effort, the state must outline a strategy for eliminating the cap on special education funding, which significantly decreases reimbursements to towns.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of SB-1056.