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**Connecticut Education
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National Education Association

Written Testimony of

Jeff Leake, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee

**Re: SB 1056 AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXCESS COST THRESHOLD
AND THE COLLECTION OF DATA RELATING TO PER PUPIL COST
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION**

March 11, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jeff Leake, and I am Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association.

I submit these written remarks on behalf of the 43,000 members of the Connecticut Education Association in support, with qualification, of S.B. No. 1056, which begins to address the need for the State of Connecticut to pay its share of excess costs for special education in Connecticut's schools.

There is no shortage of evidence neither that special education costs have escalated beyond the increase in general per-pupil spending nor that in some communities the percentage of the school budget attributed to special education costs is causing concern and division in those communities. The CEA has been calling for action to address the unfunded federal special education mandate for some time, and we support this bill and its approach to addressing this need for changes in the financing of our special education costs.

Connecticut lawmakers must recognize that the responsibility for funding special education ultimately falls to the state, particularly for children whose education costs exceed local per-pupil expenditures. The unpredictable nature of excess special education costs places an unfair burden on local budgets and, in an environment of fiscal austerity, squeezes out funds for regular programs.

From fiscal year 2017 to 2021, the state of Connecticut would gradually assume an increasing share of special education costs, thereby lessening the burden on local school and municipal budgets. Using this modest phase-in approach, a local community would still be funding two times the amount of its average per-pupil expenditure for each of its special education students. It is an approach that is overdue and would more equitably share the responsibility for funding the education of those students who need the most support and intervention.

The concern we have is for one section of the bill which requires the reporting of “the individual expenditure for each child requiring special education and related services, as defined in section 10-76a.” Our concern is that in certain situations this might lead to the identification of the student and therefore the special education program in which the student is enrolled. With all of the concerns about data breaches, we believe this added wording requires a second look and a review of possible negative privacy circumstances.