



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE CAPITOL

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

REPRESENTATIVE FRED WILMS

ONE HUNDRED FORTY-SECOND DISTRICT

MEMBER

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4200
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HARTFORD, CT 06106

Testimony HB 1097 An Act Concerning State Funding For Education

Education Committee

3/19/15

Chairman Fleischmann, Chairman Slossberg, Ranking Members Boucher and Lavielle, esteemed Education Committee members: thank you for allowing me to testify today on Raised Bill 1097. Please know that I support requiring state grants be made within available appropriations.

Since that bill falls under the category of An Act Concerning State Funding for Education, I wish to discuss my proposed bill HR5670 which deals with Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funding. I would like to ask the committee to consider adding my proposal, highlighted in the House Raised Bill 5670, to the underlying bill.

HR5670 would correct an inequity in the ECS formula. That inequity resides within the State Aid Percentage calculation which numerically weights 90% towards a town's property wealth (i.e. the equalized net grand list) and only 10% towards the median income of the town's citizens.

The calculation assumes that property wealth determines the ability of a town to support its public school system through its ability to raise property taxes. While this is true for towns with high property wealth/high town income and most certainly not true for towns with low property

wealth/low town income, there is an in between category that falls through the cracks. What about those towns with high property wealth/moderate town income?

Two such towns to come to mind - Norwalk and Stamford. As a representative of the 142nd district from Norwalk, I will respectfully confine my comments to Norwalk.

Here is the problem Norwalk faces: while Norwalk is the sixth largest town in CT, its ECS grant of \$11,275,807 ranks only 40th. As a result fully 93% of Norwalk's education budget is funded from local Norwalk taxpayers. This is a far cry from the 50% local/50% state ideal sharing. Norwalk citizens clearly believe that they are not getting their fair share.

Norwalk's problem exists because it is a city surrounded by the wealthy suburbs of Darien, Wilton, Westport, New Canaan and Weston. Their high property values spill into Norwalk. However Norwalk's high property values have little to do with its taxpayers ability to pay higher taxes. Norwalk median household income in 2012 stood at \$77,327 vs. an average of \$160,000 of our five wealthy neighbors. Norwalk ELL students as a percentage of total stood at 12% vs. 1% for our neighbors. Roughly 51% of Norwalk public schools students are eligible for Free/Reduced school lunches. In 2012 that figure was 47% while the average of our suburban neighbors was only 2%.

Norwalk is the sixth largest city in Connecticut with over 85,000 residents. It is wonderfully diverse multi-cultural community. I am proud to represent Norwalk here at the State Legislature. The majority of its residents fall squarely into a working and middle class demographic. Our population is 69% white, 14% African American and 24% Latino.

The Connecticut Department of Education certainly does not rank Norwalk like its suburban neighbors. Not only has the Department designated Norwalk as an Alliance District, it has placed Norwalk in District Reference Group H (DRG-H). The DRG rankings capture socioeconomic factors, and at DRG H, Norwalk is ranked in the next to most stressed category. Most of Norwalk's suburban neighbors by contrast are ranked DRG A.

The ECS formula unfairly disadvantages Norwalk relative to its other DRG H towns. Norwalk average ECS aid per student was \$833 in 2014 versus \$6,162 average for the other DRG H towns.

HR5670 seeks to address this funding inequity by increasing the ECS formula town income adjustment from 10% to 50% and reducing the town property wealth component from 90% to 50%. It also seeks to be balanced and realistic. It proposes that no town would receive any less funding than it currently receives and further proposes that this formula change only apply to new/additional ECS funding.

In conclusion, I understand that I am not the first representative to seek ECS formula changes. I understand that we must comply with the Horton vs. Meskill decision. I understand that change does not happen overnight. However I am here to represent my Norwalk constituents and hope that HR5670 can be added by this committee.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fred Wilms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "F".

Representative Fred Wilms
142nd Legislative District