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**Connecticut Education
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Testimony of

Mark Waxenberg

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

April 15, 2015

Re: HB7054 AAC Keno

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee. My name is Mark Waxenberg, Executive Director for the Connecticut Education Association.

I am here today to testify on **HB7054 AAC Keno** and the need for the state to generate sufficient revenue to fund Connecticut's schools.

I want to first share with you the magnitude of the problem. As many of you know, 119 Connecticut towns do not receive their full funding under the Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS). As it stands, this means that the state is shortchanging municipalities about \$690 million in ECS alone. The governor's proposed budget does not include any additional funding for ECS over the biennium.

The governor's proposed budget also proposes other cuts to schools. Statutory formula grants for services such as transportation, special education, and adult education are reduced by \$123 million in FY16 and \$134 million in FY17. Grants for programs that operate outside of the school day and that are critical for addressing the multiple challenges many children face, particularly in less wealthy cities and neighborhoods, are slashed by \$33 million in Year1 and \$38 million in Year2 of the biennium (an example of the impact of these proposed cuts on Bridgeport is attached at the end of testimony).

All told, the state is proposed to shortchange public schools by about \$850 million in each year of the biennium.

This is not just an appropriations issue. This is an issue about pursuing a comprehensive approach that ensures sufficient state and local tax revenues for critical public services.

Faced with a funding crisis, Connecticut must do more – this year – to generate sufficient revenues for its schools. Failure to do so means more cuts to already strained and lean school budgets. And it means digging Connecticut's debt to its public schools even deeper.

We need to begin to go in the other direction. Given the state's constitutional obligation to equalize funding for schools, CEA has long advocated for more progressive and comprehensive approaches to revenue generation for education. We have advocated for dedicated funding sources, and for a school funding system that is less vulnerable to distortions inherent in the unpredictable annual budgeting process. We continue to urge lawmakers to consider strategies for setting aside state revenue for schools in a fund devoted solely to meeting the state's constitutional obligation to equalize educational opportunity across the state. Doing so would be more transparent and help to insulate school funds from the volatile annual budgeting process.

The State Tax Panel established last session should consider these options as well. Other states have done this, and so can we.