

**Testimony Regarding
H.B. 5044, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the
Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017**

Katie Roy, Director & Founder
Committee on Appropriations
Tuesday, February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding H.B. 5044 and the State's budget for elementary and secondary education.

My name is Katie Roy and I am the director and founder of the Connecticut School Finance Project. Founded in June 2015, the Connecticut School Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit project that aims to fix the illogical and inequitable system by which Connecticut funds its public schools. Our organization strives to serve as a trusted source of accurate school finance data and information, and is focused on three primary goals:

- 1) Building knowledge about how the current school funding system works,
- 2) Bringing together stakeholders who are impacted by how schools are funded, and
- 3) Identifying solutions to Connecticut's school funding challenges that are fair to students and taxpayers, and strengthen schools and communities.

My testimony today will not focus on the specific allocations or potential cuts to Connecticut's public schools laid out in H.B. 5044. Instead, I would like to encourage the Committee—as it continues its long and very difficult budgetary task—to focus on HOW public schools in Connecticut are funded, rather than simply examining HOW MUCH districts are receiving.

Connecticut currently finds itself with a school finance system that not only defies logic but also funds public schools arbitrarily and inequitably. Adopted by the legislature more than three decades ago, Connecticut's school finance system has been altered and changed so many times it no longer addresses the problems of inequity it was created to solve.

Not only does our state now use 11 different funding formulas to distribute resources to public schools, none of the formulas truly take into consideration the learning needs of students or the needs of the schools that serve them.¹ This is particularly apparent with

¹ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262h (2013).

the Education Cost Sharing formula, which, beginning with the 2013-14 school year, has not even been used because the state did not have enough money to fully fund the formula's phase-in plan.^{2,3}

Rather than modifying the ECS formula or adopting a new one fair to students, schools, and communities, our state now relies on a system of block grants to each city and town to help fund public schools,⁴ resulting in a school finance system based primarily on historical precedent that fails to take into account changes in enrollment, student needs, and community wealth.

Connecticut's arbitrary education funding also extends to the state's schools of choice, where 10 different formulas (or statutory per pupil amounts) are used to fund school choice programs, including: magnet schools, the Connecticut Technical High School System, charter schools, and vocational agriculture programs. Each of these formulas was created independently of the others and none of them take students' learning needs into account.⁵

We cannot achieve equitable school funding through block grants and temporary, inconsistent fixes. Our state needs a fair finance system that uses one funding formula to fund all students based on their learning needs; distributes education dollars in a way that is consistent, predictable, efficient, and transparent; and takes community wealth into account and works within the confines of the state's budget.

I respectfully ask the Committee to keep this mind throughout its budgetary discussions and the legislative session.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony, and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Katie Roy
Director & Founder
Connecticut School Finance Project
katie.roy@ctschoolfinance.org

² An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015. 18 Conn. Acts 14-47, 30 June 2014.

³ CT Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. (2015) *Funding Status of Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS) for Towns in FY2014-15*.

⁴ An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015. 18 Conn. Acts 14-47, 30 June 2014.

⁵ Moran, John, Office of Legislative Research. (2014). *OLR Research Report: Comparison of Charter, Magnet, Agricultural Science Centers, and Technical High Schools* (2014-R-0257). Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2014/rpt/2014-R-0257.htm>.