



Testimony of
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Appropriations Committee Hearing
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HB 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jan Hochadel and I am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing more than 30,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. It is on their behalf that I appear before you to today.

The Connecticut constitution requires the state to “provide a substantially equal educational opportunity.” The Connecticut Supreme Court invalidated the state’s education finance system in 1977 in *Horton v. Meskill* because it generated large per-pupil spending disparities. It would not be a stretch to suggest Governor Malloy’s budget proposal would undo much of the work that has been done to mitigate these disparities in funding and quality.

In the lead up to his budget address, Governor Malloy boasted publicly that his proposal did not harm resources for education. In reality, the Governor’s proposed budget adjustments flat fund Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants, delivering an effective \$11.4M+ cut. It also cuts \$8 million in special education funding, slashes magnet school dollars by \$18.6M, threatens adult education programs and trims \$2.5M from priority district grants. In short, this budget would set undo much progress that’s been made for Connecticut’s students and their teachers in recent years.

Prior to the FY 2016 budget enacted in June 2015, ECS grants had been frozen since FY 2009. Subsequent budgets were built upon the FY 2009 grant amounts, rather than utilize the ECS formula. As a result, a number of key variables (enrollment, special education students, Title I and certain ELL students) had not been employed. In the FY 2016 budget, a small group of districts received additional funds to offset these shortfalls. It was a start to undo some of the damage done by flat funding. This proposal undoes that, yet still manages to include \$9.3 million in new dollars for charter schools. Halting charter school grade expansion would be disruptive for existing charter school students, but so is continued underfunding of traditional neighborhood schools. This budget is little more than a prescription for municipalities to raise property taxes. I urge you to fully fund ECS grants at the level passed last June.

We are also very concerned about the consolidation of line items in this proposed budget. Key, vital programs will be lost if the General Assembly cedes its authority to budget by line item to non-elected political appointees. In order to preserve the success of the Connecticut Technical High School System, the additional support provided by the Commissioner’s Network and the

much-needed resources for bilingual education, I urge you to reject block grant agency budgeting and dedicate funds to programs in which you have invested and prioritized.

Lastly, I'd be remiss if I didn't speak about CommPACT Schools. The CommPACT Community Schools Collaborative is a coalition of UConn's Neag School of Education, American Federation of Teachers Connecticut, Connecticut Education Association, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and Connecticut Federation of School Administrators. The purpose of the coalition is to provide support to districts committed to improving family and community engagement as part of their efforts to improve student learning. By sharing best practices and providing resources, materials, technical assistance, and evaluation frameworks, the coalition guides the establishment of community schools, which provide additional services to students and their families.

CommPACT has established family and community engagement centers in in four schools across the state: Bassick High School in Bridgeport; West Side Middle School in Waterbury; John Barry Elementary School in Meriden; and Robert O'Brien STEM Academy in East Hartford. These centers serve many purposes, including rooms for parent-teacher-student conversations and intervention rooms that are used to help students resolve conflicts before they escalate. CommPACT also helps these schools to identify strengths and resources in their community by using the Aspire Survey.

Research overwhelmingly shows that parent engagement is a key component of student success. School design turnaround plans and school improvement plans therefore are investing more in methods that improve parental involvement. CommPACT is a resource that districts are using to help them do this. The results have been significant.

The governor's proposed budget completely eliminates all of CommPACT's funding - \$350,000. I understand that in a budget year like this, \$350,000 is a large hole to fill, but these funds have significant positive impacts on schools, parents and communities. You have restored cuts to this program in the past. We hope you will do the same again.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.