

Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, CEO, ConnCAN

Public Hearing before the Joint Committee on Appropriations

Governor's H.B. No. 5044: An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30 2017

Tuesday, February 16, 2016

Good evening Chairwoman Bye, Chairwoman Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, better known as ConnCAN.

For more than a decade, our organization has worked to promote student-focused policies that ensure all children get a great education they can count on. Collectively, we've made great progress in recent years. From setting the bar high for our students with college and career ready standards to increasing access to great schools and teachers that can change a child's life, Connecticut has taken promising steps forward. We must continue that progress--even in the face of the significant fiscal challenges facing our state--because great public schools not only transform children's lives but also help ensure the long-term economic prosperity of Connecticut.

We are pleased to see, in this difficult time, that the Governor has proposed holding the state's commitment to education in this budget. Education is the gateway to our state's future prosperity. We all want to create a Connecticut that thrives in tomorrow's global economy. Our ability to meet that goal depends on whether or not we keep the promise of a great education for all kids and continue investment in our students today.

We understand that you will need to make difficult decisions in the coming weeks, and hope that you will uphold progress and maintain the level-funding commitments to key education initiatives as proposed in this budget. While we urge you to ensure that the education budget is saved from deep cuts, we must also recognize that flat funding for our state's schools, without any change to how we fund all schools, is not sustainable and only exacerbates the inequities of our broken funding formula and system.

Our current funding system is illogical, outdated, and profoundly inequitable across towns and school types. The reality is that we are no longer following a funding formula at all. We currently use about 11 different ways of funding students depending on what type of school a child attends, without direct and consistent link to children's specific learning needs or a town's ability to pay for education locally.

This system pits towns and school types against each other. That must change. As you make difficult decisions in the weeks ahead, I urge you to look ahead and move towards a funding system that funds students fairly across all school types. We need to move away from our current funding system, which is completely out of sync with other states and which tells families that their child is worth thousands of dollars less at one type of public school than another. We need move towards a system that supports families who have chosen a public school that works best for their child. We must proceed towards a system that supports public schools of all types, particularly those that are working to close our state's pervasive and persistent achievement gaps.

We urge members of this committee to maintain and improve upon the Governor's education budget proposal. And we urge you to move our state towards a student-centered funding system that funds students with similar learning needs fairly, better accounts for student need and town wealth, and is based on what it takes to provide every child with an excellent education, across all types of public schools and districts.

Everyone in this room is well aware of our current fiscal situation, and we know that the work of this committee and the General Assembly will be arduous this legislative session. Let us also remember the high price we will pay if we do not continue to improve our schools.

Right now, far too many children lack access to high quality public schools. Unless we can move forward boldly with a quality education for all students, Connecticut's residents will lose billions in lifetime earnings, and our state will face hundreds of millions in increased healthcare costs, and tens of millions lost to the state's economy each year.

We urge you to put children, especially children who need higher quality schools now, front and center and use every resource at your disposal to ensure their success. As you do, look for solutions to fairly and sustainably fund all of our public schools and treat all students equitably. Our civic and economic future depends on it.

Thank you.