



Testimony of  
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AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Appropriations Committee Hearing  
February 16, 2016

***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 Patti Fusco. I am a teacher in West Haven public schools and I am the Divisional Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing nearly 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 testify today, as well as the behalf of the state's students, who are not able to advocate for themselves.

The Governor's proposed flat funding of ECS along with cuts to special education, magnet schools, school transportation, adult education and priority district funding are going to cause devastation to many programs that have been put in place to help our students be successful. Those in higher needs districts will be affected the most—with cuts to priority districts and early literacy programs as well as the Regional Service Centers which provide assistance for special education such as occupational and physical therapy, as well as a place for students who require their educational programs be outside their own districts.

I live and teach in West Haven. My city already struggles to provide an education to the 5,886 students that are presently enrolled in our schools. Our city does not have extra funds to supplement education and to make up for what we will not be receiving from the state. Our tax rate is already very high and many properties go into foreclosure every year because the owners lose their ability to pay their mortgages and taxes. Industry is not expanding rapidly enough to make up for the abandoned properties.

The needs of our students grow each year; they do not stay the same. Students entering our schools bring with them a myriad of special needs—needs beyond what the district is able to fill. We try to educate everyone in house, and have several classrooms for students with special needs that in years past would have been out placed. Several students are in mobilized wheelchairs, have feeding tubes, and other physical disabilities. We have had to hire nurses' aides and licensed practical nurses to assist with their medical needs while they are in school, because although we do have at least one school nurse in every building, that is not enough to keep our students safe. We now have two behaviorists on staff to help with the autistic population that increases each year.

We have students entering West Haven schools who do not speak English as their primary language almost every single week. Over the past three years we have had 111 new students

enter who needed ELL services. Eighty more brand new students entered with special education needs during that same time period. Our Birth to Three population has increased substantially as well. These children need extra help.

We have had to add ELL teachers to our staff so that most of our schools now have two full time ELL teachers and several full and part time tutors. We have had to expand our special education staff as well, and added special education pre-schools to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of three year olds who live in our district and require services. We have always included typical students in those pre-school classes thanks to state grants. Next year the board may have to cut those students out. There simply is not room without adding even more classes, and we cannot afford that under this proposal. We now have a full time team of special education teachers, speech language pathologists, and other professionals who work with our birth to three babies who have special needs.

After school funding is also in jeopardy. West Haven is not a rich town, and most parents work, some two or three jobs. They rely on our after school programs to keep their children safe. These programs provide the students with extra help academically that their parents may not be able to offer because of their own limited educations. It also provides them with a social outlet to keep them out of trouble.

We just added an All Day Kindergarten program this past year in all of our elementary schools. This program caused us to have to hire eight more regular education teachers, three more paraprofessionals, and three more itinerant teachers. How will we sustain this program which is sorely needed if the funding is cut? Will we have to cut the extra literacy and math coaches that we added to help our students master the rigorous curriculum? Will our class sizes have to expand rather than decrease as we have been striving to do over the past several years? Where will the cuts have to be made?

Our Adult Education program will suffer from this budget cut. Many of our residents rely on Adult Education for their high school diplomas, as well as for the other courses we offer. We have expanded offerings over the years to afford residents the opportunity to earn a high school diploma in different ways-besides the traditional four years of high school. Adults can participate in our high school diploma courses, earn a GED, or thanks to federal dollars earn it via the National External Diploma program. We also offer certified nurse's aide program, and other career pathways for students. Our mission has been to help our citizens to be productive members of society. We have a Workforce Alliance Program that trains people on how to apply for jobs, and to be successful once they get hired. Many of the parents of the ELL students attend our English as a Second Language classes as well as our citizenship classes. These are all at risk under the governor's proposed budget.

My city is one of 169 towns in Connecticut, but I do not think we are unique in our needs. I think that most districts face the same issues, and will have the same problem getting funding from the municipalities that are already struggling to provide a high quality education. Please consider them when you are considering the budget.

Thank you very much for your attention.