

TESTIMONY TO APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE RESC ALLIANCE

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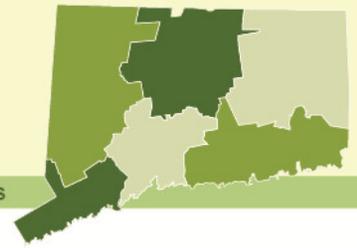
Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Eileen Howley, I am the Executive Director of LEARN. I am here to speak on behalf of the RESC Alliance, the organization representing the regional educational service centers across CT. We urge the General Assembly to reconsider the Governor's decision and to restore the direct funding to the RESCs.

As you may know, Regional Educational Service Centers or RESCs are not-for-profit, fee for service public education agencies that support the educational needs of our member school districts. Established by C. G. S. 10-66 more than 45 years ago, for "the purpose of cooperative action to furnish programs and services," we have provided cost efficient, cooperative solutions that have addressed educational needs and supported savings for our member school districts. We operate independently, serving our regional member school districts in our six regions—ACES, CES, CREC, EASTCONN, EDUCATION CONNECTION, and LEARN. We also work together as an alliance, the six RESCs acting as one, as a statewide network in the procurement of resources and delivery of services for our members.

All RESCs are governed by Boards that consist of locally elected Board members from our member districts from each of our regions. We are dedicated to supporting local school districts to improve teaching and learning. We regularly facilitate partnerships with many different stakeholders and are dedicated to providing high quality and affordable solutions that address regional educational needs. All RESCs provide many common services, while each also has specializations that are driven by the regional needs and interests. Our services are responsive to local needs and inter-district and regional opportunities. Our services are across a broad spectrum from special education and related services, to professional development for educators to school improvement, curriculum development and coaching, early childhood programs and services, and magnet schools, to name a few.

The RESC Alliance appreciates and values the vision of strengthening and creating regional solutions to our state's education needs. We are committed to providing the highest quality services in the best interests of the educators, children, families, and communities that we serve.

Together, we are an effective delivery service for statewide educational needs. For example, we serve as a statewide delivery service for the CT State Department of Education in supporting statewide implementation of education initiatives such as teacher evaluation, common core coaching services, and



new teacher development through TEAM. Our staff recently supported the Commissioner in the strategic planning process with the State Board of Education.

Given recent legislation, we are working to complete the special education and English language learner surveys to collect data from our local school districts. We also are serving on the Special Education Funding Task Force.

In ever tightening budgets, regional and cooperative solutions are essential and the legislature's decision to turn to us speaks to why we were established. At the same time, the Governor's budget eliminates the direct support for RESCs. Such support allows us to initiate and support new cooperative ventures and opportunities. In addition to the types of services just described, we also continuously seek for new regional opportunities.

For example, recent work in promoting insurance cooperatives or stop loss insurance in several of our RESCs are examples of how we promote voluntary cooperation across our membership. Expansions of programs to meet local needs often require investing dollars and staff time into that development, such as growing our special education services. We urge you to reverse the Governor's recommendation and to reconsider his elimination of all direct support for RESCs. RESCs rely predominantly on state and federal grants and sale of service to achieve our outcomes. The dollars currently received directly from the legislature allows us to undertake the types of activities that are being promoted as regional solutions. We do not have the ability to levy taxes for new initiatives. Our staff are highly skilled and trained in specific fields; to respond to new requests, we must divert their work, add staff or re-deploy them. (At the same time, when state programs are cut, or grant programs reduced, we must eliminate positions.) By eliminating even the smallest direct funding from RESCs, our ability to expand to other regional solutions becomes reduced or eliminated. We simply cannot implement legislative initiatives without any dollars to support them.

In these challenging economic times, we urge you to consider our long successful history in CT as a delivery mechanism for regional and statewide solutions. We encourage you to consider that now is not the time to reduce our efforts at regionalism, but rather to support and expand them, to use our services to promote the regional solutions that you seek.