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Written Testimony for Education Committee Public Hearing February 24, 2015 SB 175 - AN ACT CONCERNING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) is a non-profit professional association that represents school business officials (SBOs) throughout the State of Connecticut. SBOs work closely with school boards, administrators, staff, public officials and communities; and are responsible for most aspects of school business and operations.

CASBO would like to provide input to the Education Committee as it considers revisions to section 10-262j (MBR) of the 2016 supplement. Our comments and recommendations, which are specific to Section 10-262j subsections (b) (1) and (b) (2), are:

1. These subsections deal with the fixed formulas for calculating MBR reductions. We believe the real purpose of the law was to provide school districts with flexibility in dealing with MBR. This was accomplished in the last sentence of (b) (2), "... the Commissioner of Education may, following a review of a town's proposed reductions to its appropriation for education, permit a town to reduce its budgeted appropriation for education in an amount greater than three percent if the board of education for such town has approved, by vote at a meeting duly called, such proposed reductions."
We believe if this subsection is revised, to permit any reductions if the Board of Education and the Commissioner approves, will provide more flexibility by dealing with specific circumstances on an individual district basis.
2. We are very concerned about the fixed formulas included in these subsections for enrollment reductions. They are not warranted, cause great confusion and should be deleted. Budgets for BOEs and municipalities have been very tight for many years and are expected to be tight for many years to come. As a result, budgets are very carefully developed and vetted by all parties. BOEs already adjust budgets for enrollment decreases, when warranted. It is important to note that enrollment decreases do not automatically reduce a school budget by a set dollar amount. For instance, an enrollment decrease of 30 students could be spread across 10 grades. This could increase class size per grade from 21 to 24 but not necessarily result in staff reductions or reductions in the number of school buses. There would be some reduction in instructional supplies but this would be far less than the current 50% of net current expenditures.
3. Many BOE's and municipal leaders enjoy very positive and collaborative relationships. This current MBR law has, at times, been misconstrued and used as leverage to force unwarranted reductions. As a result, this is creating a divisive atmosphere among key stakeholders.
4. Changing demographics in many towns have resulted in the need for more resources even though overall enrollment is going down. Many school districts have seen an increase in the number of ELL, special education, and free and reduced lunch students even though the overall student population is lower. These students require more resources, which is another reason that enrollment decreases alone cannot be the basis for adjusting MBR. A full review of all the many factors that go into the development of school budgets must be all considered in order to properly educate all the students in a school district.

In summary, CASBO believes that our suggestions will maintain the intent of the law by enhancing flexibility while reducing misunderstanding and divisiveness. As a result, we strongly urge the Education Committee to revise the current MBR law.