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Testimony Regarding

Raised Bill 5601

An Act Concerning the Connecticut Transportation Institute and Study of  
School Transportation Efficiencies

made before the

Planning and Development Committee

March 11, 2016

Senator Osten, Representative Miller, members of the Planning and Development Committee - my name is John Filchak, Executive Director of the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments. I also come before you today as a member of the Commission on Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (MORE) where I chaired the Education Policy Working Group for the Regional Entities Subcommittee. **Raised Bill 5601 speaks directly to issues we examined through the Education Policy Working Group and I urge your favorable consideration of this legislation.**

Connecticut does not have any metric that measures the use of public funds for student transportation. This lack of information severely limits the state's ability to create incentives for efficiency. Raised Bill 5601 would reverse this situation and lead to a more efficient use of public funds for the transportation of students in our state.

According to a recent Office of Legislative Research Report<sup>1</sup>:

*State law requires school districts to provide transportation for all school-age children whenever it is "reasonable and desirable" (CGS § 10-220(a)). In general, this requirement is limited to transportation to public and certain nonprofit, private schools located within the school district. The only out-of-district transportation school districts must provide is for students attending state technical high schools and district designated regional agricultural science and technology centers. Within these requirements, local and regional boards of education retain discretion over district transportation policies, including the number of school buses, bus routes and stops, the students to whom they will provide transportation, and maximum walking distances. The SDE has issued guidelines for district policies (School Accommodations Workshop Package, October 2008, pp. 28-31), but they are not mandatory. The state provides an annual grant to local school districts that reimburses them for part of the cost of providing public school transportation. Reimbursement percentages vary from zero to 60% depending on the relative wealth of the town or towns making up the district. The state also provides additional funds for school districts, regional education service centers, and other entities that provide transportation for students attending certain schools outside their home districts."*

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Legislative Research Report 2012-R-0085, By: Judith Lohman, Assistant Director, February 6, 2012 "School Transportation Requirements and Funding"

Based on figures compiled by the Connecticut School Transportation Association, “public school transportation cost \$362,082,815”<sup>2</sup> (2006-07 school year). The total number of public school students transported was 456,652. Local schools transported 418,513 students, 17,450 special needs students, 4,111 In-town Vo-Tech students, 6,705 out-of-town vo-tech and vocational agricultural students, 6,621 out-of-town magnet school students, 3,140 out-of-town public high school students and 112 out-of-town charter students. Total public expenditures for private school transportation was \$21,177,896 (2006-07 school year). Total number of private school students transported was 21,166.<sup>3</sup> That association also notes that the “percentage of total student population receiving public transportation is 80%. Average per pupil cost for public school transportation \$792.91. Per pupil cost for local schools \$482.82. Per pupil cost for special ed students on special vehicles \$6,546.49. Average per pupil reimbursement for private school transportation \$188.74.”<sup>4</sup>

The FY 2015 State Budget includes two statutory grants<sup>5</sup> to municipalities specifically for school transportation totaling \$28,480,248: Public School Transportation Grant - \$24,884,748, Non-Public School Transportation Grant - \$3,595,500. In addition, \$62 million was granted to school districts and RESCS for Magnet School and Open Choice.

The monies provided to municipalities for student transportation come with no incentives or conditions for cost efficiencies. A recent report from Oregon concluded that transportation “expenditures could be reduced by an estimated 9 percent if inefficient districts adopted the practices of the most cost-efficient districts.”<sup>6</sup> If this were the case in Connecticut, the resulting annual savings would be \$2,563,222 to the State. Based on the ED001 data, school districts spent \$451,735,621 on school transportation in FY14 (this includes the reimbursements that they received from the state, but does not include funds provided to RESCs for Open Choice and magnet transportation.) Based on the 9% savings, the savings would be \$40,656,205 - \$2.56m to the state, the rest to the districts. Of the \$451.7m, \$162.8m is special education transportation.

The State of Washington, as one example, has developed and Efficiency Rating System (ERS) for school district efficiency.

*ERS employs a methodology known as the Target Cost approach, which produces **estimates of the best possible performance of each school district relative to peer school districts**, while taking into account as many school district site characteristics as possible.*

*The **objective of the ERS is to identify, for each school district, an empirically based and mathematically sound minimum expenditure level and minimum number of buses** that allows the school district to transport its students to and from school, while recognizing local site characteristics that influence cost, but are beyond the direct control of school district management.*

*The intent is to be able to identify school districts that, while receiving full funding under the STARS, have room for improving efficiency. It is also useful to employ this tool as a mechanism to identify what the costs should be for a school district that consistently expends more than the formula provides. In*

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<sup>2</sup>Connecticut School Transportation Association, <http://ctschoolbus.com/index.php>

<sup>3</sup> IBID

<sup>4</sup> IBID

<sup>5</sup> State Of Connecticut, Fy 2015, Fy 2016 And Fy 2017 - Estimates Of State Formula Aid To Municipalities

<sup>6</sup> Oregon Public School Transportation Funding: An Evaluation of Alternative Methods Prepared for The Oregon Department of Education January 2009

*this sense, it provides a “target” of what such a school district should aim for in attempting to operate more economically.<sup>7</sup> (emphasis added)*

Finally, funding this work through the Regional Performance Incentive Program makes sense. The initiative is fully consistent with the intent of that program - to foster regionalism and efficiencies in the spending of public funds.

Thank you for your consideration of our position on this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or need additional information.

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<sup>7</sup> A Description of the Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System Efficiency Rating Process, State of Washington, <http://www.k12.wa.us/transportation/STARS/EfficiencyRatings/efficiencysystemdescription.pdf>