Testimony on House Bill 5340
Submitted by Suzanne Bates, Policy Director

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Good afternoon. My name is Suzanne Bates. I am the policy director for the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, a Connecticut-based think tank.

I am here to speak in favor of House Bill 5340.

We all know that workforce needs are changing. Our state's educational system needs to prepare today's children for the jobs of tomorrow. How are we doing?

Connecticut's achievement gap persists, which affects low income students and children of color. For all students, our achievement level compared to other states is falling. Fewer than half of Connecticut’s students are meeting grade level standards for math.¹ Based on statewide SAT scores, fewer than four in ten students are ready for college-level math. Our 8th grade math students now rank 21st in the country in math scores.²

Meanwhile, Connecticut spends more than other states but does not necessarily see the benefits. And unfortunately, too often that money does not make it to the classroom.

It is time to think more innovatively about how we deliver education to our students. Innovation is taking place across the nation, particularly in schools of choice.

Innovation is also taking place in the funding of education. As we think about how to diversify choices and options for parents and children, we ask you to consider Education Savings or Scholarship Accounts (ESAs).³

A portion of public dollars designated for a child is placed into an account that is parent-directed, but can only be used within parameters set by the state. The money could be used to pay for expenses like tuition for independent schools, online learning, tutoring, learning therapies, college savings, textbooks, and other services.

¹ ConnCan 2018 Field Guide, p. 25
Traditional public schools do not meet the needs of every child. ESAs offer a way for children to succeed in a learning environment that makes sense for them. This is not about replacing traditional public schools – there should be space for all types of schools in Connecticut. Studies show that greater parent choice improves the quality of all schools.

We hope the state will move forward with a study of ESAs, and will include many educational partners in this study, including parents, students, and educators from all types of schools, and from a variety of cities and towns across the state.

Thank you for raising this bill, and for considering a study of ESAs.