Testimony
Submitted to the
Appropriations Committee

March 6, 2019

HB 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative DiMassa, and members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Bob Mitchell, Chairman of the Montville Board of Education and President of CABE.

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, while recognizing the significant fiscal challenges faced by the state, is deeply concerned about a number of the proposals in HB 7148. The economic challenges faced at all of levels of government are felt most intensively at the local level – where we are in the middle of the budget development and adoption season. Many districts have faced several years of 0% budget increases. Given the number of new initiatives and reforms put in place by the federal, state and local governments, this is a time where we need to maintain our investment in our public schools.

CABE is particularly concerned with the provisions that would require contributions from local communities towards the normal cost of funding the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS). Communities have had no opportunity to address this issue during the course of collective bargaining. Teacher salaries are not unilaterally determined by the board or education. They are determined in the context of a very difficult collective bargaining system that concludes in binding arbitration and effectively removes control of teacher salaries from boards of education. The difference in pension costs between towns is not related as much to salaries as it is to length of service – which is a prime determinant of pension amounts under the formula adopted by the General Assembly.

The acceleration of the elimination of the Education Cost Sharing Grant for certain communities, coming at the same time as the proposal to require TRS contributions, will be very challenging. This will exacerbate the constraints on the local budgets and the ability to provide quality educational services.

Continuation of the cap on the Special Education Excess Cost Grant, adult education, and bilingual education creates an increased hardship on local districts as these costs rise. We do applaud the initiatives proposed by the Governor that would explore more cost effective delivery models for special education, but until such time as those are in place, the removal of the cap on the Special Education Excess Cost Grant would restore the safety net available to districts for these extraordinary educational costs.

CABE also cautions against the sudden shift from Free and Reduced Price Lunch data to the “direct certification counts”, in the ECS formula, as this has a significant negative impact on some of Connecticut’s neediest districts.
The proposal to eliminate state funding for health and welfare service to pupils in private schools, and to require that the private schools reimburse the local school districts will put local districts in the position of collection agencies, with no recourse if the private school is unwilling or unable to pay.

CABE strongly supports the provision in the budget to increase the number of minority teachers in our public schools. Expanding eligibility for the Connecticut Housing Authority Down Payment Assistance Program is a valuable initiative.

The lack of minority representation in our public schools is an issue of concern to all districts in Connecticut. We want our students to have the opportunity to learn from educators from a variety of backgrounds, races and culture. While progress has been made in increasing the number of educators of color, much work remains to be done. Currently students of color account for over 40% of Connecticut’s student population, while only 8.7% of the state public schools teachers and administrators are people of color.

CABE established a Diversity Committee to address this issue, as well as the lack of diversity on boards of education. Some of the work of that Committee has been to support school boards in having conversations with their community about the importance of diversity. There are also specific programs such as RELAY which some Connecticut districts are using to enable staff to become certified educators. CABE has adopted a position urging all districts to continue their efforts to increase the recruitment of qualified individuals who reflect the state’s diversity to the teaching profession and administration.

We appreciate your attention to these issues.