April 3, 2019

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

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative DiMassa, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Newtown Board of Education recognizes the significant fiscal challenges facing the state, yet the requirement that local communities contribute towards the normal cost of the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS) will add to property taxes and should not be part of the solution.

As proposed, at least 25% of the "normal" teachers' pension costs would be shifted to local communities. And for many towns, considerably more than the 25% will be required, since the bill also calls for towns that pay teacher salaries above the median to pay an additional percentage on top of the 25%.

This is an unfair surcharge for many municipalities, in that the normal cost already reflects the costs associated with higher salaries. Paying an additional percentage for salaries above the median would be an added penalty.

Teacher’s salaries are largely determined by the bargaining climate in the state, salaries in surrounding towns, binding arbitration and the cost of living - influences that are beyond the control of the local districts, making the penalty seem arbitrary.

Finally, the TRS is managed and negotiated at the state level, giving the localities no control over the fund itself.

The state has instituted ambitious initiatives and reforms in the past decade. These changes have led districts to invest in programs to improve K-12 education. Initiatives, such as focused social-emotional learning, better teacher evaluations, computerized testing, and common core curriculum, required significant investments, and thus spending per pupil throughout the state has trended significantly above inflation. The bulk of those spending increases were
shouldered by local property taxes. The state should be maintaining its investment in education and its obligations to the pension fund.

Thank you,

Michelle Ku
Dr. Michelle Embree Ku, Chair

Rebekah Hamman-Stiles, Vice Chair

Daniel J. Cruso, Jr., Secretary

Debbie Leidlein

John Vouros

Andrew Clure

Daniel Delia