My name is Terra Martin. I live in New Fairfield CT.

I am here today because I am asking The Education Committee to vote in favor of HB7250.

And I am currently a mother and an organizer. However my formal education is in early childhood. I spent over 20 years as a proud, quality early childhood educator.

For several years I have been concerned about the significant decline of unstructured play in the lives of school children.

Volumes of respected research shows us that lack of play has a significant negative impact on children’s physical and emotional health, development and cognition.

Pediatricians are reporting an increase in low bone density, farsightedness and obesity in children, all directly related to lack of outside play.

For years mental health professionals have been finding that while play has declined in the lives of children, rates of depression anxiety and narcissism have risen.

Also because children’s development in all areas, including and especially in areas of sensory development, hinges on adequate outside play, occupational and physical therapist are seeing an increase in sensory related issues that impact children’s ability to function typically at home and in the classroom.

Specifically related to learning and cognition, children simply cannot learn effectively without breaks. And really that means a full physical “release” for an adequate block of time. Children’s brains cannot absorb and retain information without these kinds of breaks. Because of this, recess should be viewed as a critical part of a child’s educational success.

Additionally the expectation of children as young as five years old to eight years old, even 11 years old, to endure hours of indoor structure time,
about 6 1/2 hours for most schools, is grossly developmentally inappropriate. I have yet to find an educator who disagrees.

I would also argue that lack of recess disproportionately impacts children from low income families and those living in urban settings. These children often come home to a more challenging home life with parents who are more stressed and have less time and resources to get their children outside again after the 4:00 bus comes. For these children, school maybe the only opportunity to get outside for days. Providing them adequate outside play through additional recess, should be viewed as the responsibility of anyone who advocates for the basic needs of children.

I know administrators will have concerns about the bill, linked to not only test scores, but the 900 minutes of instructional time required of them per year. However there are public schools in Connecticut already implementing two recesses a day. Therefore we know there are working models for this that already exist in Connecticut.

And I would also ask this of those administrators respectfully, when you were asked to envision a school setting and schedule that considers the whole child, did you ever envision a school day for our youngest Nutmeggers, that only provides them with 20 minutes of outside free playtime?

It is time that Connecticut starts defending its children. We need to start pushing back on the academic push down that has garnered no real benefit, is holding administrators and educators hostage and is only harming our children.

Bill HB7250 is a positive step in that direction that will provide children with what should be viewed as a basic need.

Thank you.