Robert Sanchez, Co-Chair
Douglas McCrory, Co-Chair
Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Regarding SB 957: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE INSTRUCTION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS OF TEACHER PREPARATION AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS.

Dear Sen. Sanchez and Sen. McCrory,

Thank you for raising SB 957. I have read the bill and I am writing as a concerned member of the community to ask for language in SB 957 that specifies and provides funds for Computer Science education. I write as a 17-year teacher of Math and Computer Science in Connecticut who has had hands-on experience of the significant impact Computer Science (CS) education can have on students' lives. CS, among other things, teaches students to instruct the computer using algorithms that enable the computer to solve problems. Although this seems purely technical, it teaches students to work collaboratively and logically to solve unstructured problems. In the years that I have taught CS, I have noted that having successful outcomes in CS is really a matter of good quality exposure and support. Many students who were invited into CS classrooms would often say to me “I do not like CS and that is not what I am looking for.” This is really another way of saying, “I have no exposure to CS and I do not know what it is about.” When I have brought those students closer and given them good exposure to CS, they have continued and excelled in it. Many of the students have gone on to Silicon Valley and other cities in our country to lead CS projects that are benefitting society.

I was one of a group of five Connecticut CS teachers who saw a need to support each other and advocate for CS education for all students in 2004 by forming the Connecticut Computer Science Teachers Association (CTCSTA). CTCSTA was formed before we became aware of the national Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA, https://csteachers.org). Connecticut was there at the start and it hurts to find that other states are now ahead of us in providing access to all their students. That early involvement has put me in a position to be aware of what is going on in other states and also be a consultant for CS efforts nationwide. I have served as a member of the AP Development Committee for AP CS Principles
The bill SB 957, as it is, is it an unfunded mandate like Public Act 15-94 which it is replacing. An unfunded mandate means that some schools will not implement it and some other schools may only provide access to CS to a selection of students. It also means teachers will not get appropriate and ongoing professional development needed to keep teaching 21st century CS. This will further exacerbate the inequity in access to quality CS.

I write to urge you to use your good offices to develop a robust system for bringing quality CS to all students. We cannot afford to have some students choosing not to engage with CS because they are uninformed of what it is. We cannot afford to have a group of students without access to high paying jobs that exposure to CS provides. We cannot have our students unprepared for the jobs of the future. If we continue to give access to only a few privileged students, we will not have the workforce that our state needs to compete in the future. This will not only exacerbate the achievement gap, it will also grow the income gap among some of our communities. We now have the opportunity to effect positive change for all our students by supporting and funding CS education.

Yours sincerely,

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