

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Toni E.  
Walker

SENATORS: Abrams, Formica, Kushner,  
Osten

REPRESENTATIVES: Abercrombie, Candelaria,  
Case, Currey, Dathan,  
Felipe, Hall, Johnson,  
Kokoruda, McCarty,  
Lavielle, Porter, Rosario,  
Walker

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good morning. Good morning everybody. Good morning. I'd like to welcome everybody to day two of Appropriation hearings. Today, we're going to be for the morning we will be hearing from the State Department of Education at 10 and the Office of early Childhood at 11. Then later on this afternoon -- um -- oops -- later on this afternoon we have at two o'clock Secretary of State, at 2:30 Contract Standards Board, and then at four o'clock our public hearing for Elementary and Secondary Ed. So, with that in mind, I'm going to welcome everybody and ask Dr. Cardona if he is ready to sit down for the first time with us. Good morning. Just to let you know that there are a lot of people coming. I got a lot of texts from people saying they're coming, so I'm sure they'll be here. Also to let everybody know, also understand that there are committee meetings going on, so a lot of people are at other committee meetings, but I'm sure they will be watching this on television on CTN because they want to get the information also. So with that, Dr. Cardona.

## PUBLIC HEARING

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you very much. Thank you, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriation Committee. My name is Miguel Cardona, and I'm the Commissioner of Education. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Governor Lamont's proposed mid-term budget adjustments as pertaining to the State Department of Education. Before I go any further, I want to just acknowledge Laura Stefon, Chief of Staff of the State Department of Education. We also have superintendent of the CTECS system, Jeff Wihbey (inaudible - 00:02:47) here with us, so I just want to acknowledge them.

I'd like to start off by thanking Governor Lamont for maintaining the state's commitment to education by fully funding the increase to the ECS formula and to the legislature for the continuing to make education a priority. While our state's economy and budget are improving, we continue to live in fiscally challenging times. The decisions that you make as legislators are seldom easy, but I know you have the best interest of our students in mind, and I'm committed to working with you and with Governor Lamont on behalf of the department as long as I'm fortunate to call myself Commissioner of Education.

Governor Lamont has made K-12 education, workforce development, and diversifying the teaching profession top priorities as he outlined in his budget address last week. Creating the best trained, best educated workforce in the world takes talented teachers and robust culturally competent curriculum, which is why I'm particularly pleased that the governor included funding to new curriculum development positions within our academic office.

## PUBLIC HEARING

The governor said in the past that education is the opportunity engine for all of our young people. We know education is the great equalizer. There's likely nothing more crucial to setting up a child for success than his or her education. For these reasons, it's important that we remain child centered throughout the rest of the session as we engage in discussions that pertain to education. Our adult decisions directly impact the lives of our children in Connecticut.

We understand the ongoing need for fiscal prudence, and we stand ready to do our part while continuing to implement policies that work for closing achievement gaps, supporting teachers, diversifying the workforce, elevating learning, and acting in the best interest of the children of the state of Connecticut. The governor's state of the state address marked the start of a three-month process.

As we move forward, the department is prepared to work with the legislature to provide you with whatever guidance or information you'll need to make informed decisions to ensure equity and excellence in education for all students. Again, I appreciate being given the opportunity to sit here in front of you today, and I look forward to working with you and the governor this session. While I may have more formal responses at a later date with our working group after I confer with my team, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have this morning. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, sir, and welcome.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And, congratulations --

## PUBLIC HEARING

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And, I look so forward to working with you on -- on -- on the budget but also -- also some of the other things in education that I think we probably share and are common in our focus.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Yeah.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Clearing throat]. First of all, I'm going to say something which is going to go -- lead right into my first statement. When we have agencies come before us, they usually bring their whole team. The fact that I -- I love Ms. Dempsey [phonetic] and everybody. I think everybody does a great job. I think the thing that is very clear is that your team is small, and that to me is a big travesty on our part. We need to look at some additional staffing for you. I know the governor has talked about one academic person being added to your team, but as I was told by some other people Massachusetts has seven academics, and we seem to use Massachusetts as our barometer or competitor or whatever you would like to, you know, sort of call it, so I will say that in our subcommittee we will be talking to you about potential placements for more staff.

I, unfortunately, made some calls to SDE a couple of times trying to get details, and many times they told me we will get you that but it won't be right away because we're -- we don't have enough staff to do it, and that's unfortunate. For legislators not to be able to access data so that we can make informed decisions is very bad, so we will be having that discussion going forward, and you don't have to answer that. That's -- that's just my two cents for it.

## PUBLIC HEARING

The question that I want to ask you and there's a cut in here to bilingual education, and someone said to me that it's because of the fact that this line item has a cap, and I'm asking do you know anything about that circumstance and what the cap is and why we have it and how do we get rid of it because I know from my colleagues' comments bilingual education is grossly undermanned and addressed, and as we have change in demographics, especially in our towns and cities, it is important that we make sure that everybody gets an opportunity for a solid education. So, do you have any information on that -- on the bilingual education?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: So, yes. I do, and thank you for your comments earlier. I appreciate your sentiments. I know that while the governor's proposal does include positions that didn't exist before, when comparing to other states, it's -- it's different, much different. With regard to bilingual education, there was a grant for a pilot that was -- is going to be eliminated -- \$1.26 million dollars that was intended for a pilot so the pilot took place, and the \$1.26 million dollars that was there in the bilingual was swept, and so the pilot did take place. I understand difficult decisions have to be made. We're committed to making sure bilingual education is at the forefront. You know one of the largest growing subgroups is -- is that group, so we're -- we're committed to them.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Commissioner -- I mean I know it's very hard to know what all of our constituents say to us, but that's our job. We come back with information and questions and focus from our constituents that we serve here, so we don't expect you to know all of them --

## PUBLIC HEARING

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Right.

REP. WALKER (93RD): But when we get enough calls from people in our districts about certain things and we try and look for more details that is the problem.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Sure.

REP. WALKER (93RD): We need to make sure that we are [coughing] funding the services. Now, you said there was a pilot, but I guess we need to annualize it right into a line item so that we need to put statute in there so that this cut does not happen because we cannot afford a cut in ELL. I can tell you that. So, Senator Osten. I was just the warm-up, okay. [Laughing].

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: [Laughing]. Good morning.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, good morning, Commissioner. It's nice to see you and pleasure to have Laura Stefon next to you, a long-time Sprague resident, so.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: [Laughing].

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, I have a couple of questions. One, there is a huge cut -- not a small cut but a huge cut in charter school funding, and there is still a huge need in charter school seating both in increased grade levels and in increased number of students, and you know I know that there are some people that have a concern about charter schools, but the charter schools that I know of that are in my district are transparent organizations that you actually -- your organization actually audits very extensively. They also have -- they -- they reflect the communities that they're in so

## PUBLIC HEARING

they're not bastions of just certain populations, which I -- I think is sometimes put out there. they're often unionized. That's a choice of the workers that are there, so I think that, you know, I see this as one of those mechanisms that curtails a form of education that is actually working, and I was wondering how many schools -- charter schools do you have out there that are looking for increased seats? And, you can bring that information or have that information come to the subcommittee.

I'd also like to understand if you have audit remarks or weaknesses that -- that have been seen in charter schools? Where they are? Which charter schools have them? What are we doing to correct those weaknesses? So, I'd like to understand that too, and where are you in the auditing of charter schools?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Mm-hm.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): How many charter schools are in the state of Connecticut? So, if we -- if I could get some more detailed information on that I'd appreciate that.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Definitely happy -- happy to get that to you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And, I have another question that -- I know many of -- of my colleagues here are going to have specific questions about education, but I have a question on the finances of education at the local level, and we have a state board of education. How does that fit in with your organization -- the State Board of Education?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: So, the State Board of Education advises policy and helps with the approval

## PUBLIC HEARING

process of -- as you mentioned earlier, like for example the charter schools -- so, we have 12 charter schools coming for renewal this year. The State Board of Education members visit the schools, listen to the families, the stakeholders, and then ultimately make a decision on how long they're going to be given accreditation for or if any probation or if any more work, so they do that work with us, and they forward policies and agenda for the State Department of Education.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, the State Board of Education, what is its function with local boards of education?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Mm, okay. So, we recently brought that up at a meeting maybe two months ago about revisiting what the role is for the State Board of Education with local boards of education, and we feel strongly and unanimously voted to increase the involvement in terms of increasing providing support and guidance for local boards of education and accountability where it needs it. I feel -- I think we've had a conversation where often times it's -- it's the conversation takeover or nothing, and I think we need to put some gray in there so that our role in the role of the Board of Education for the State Department of Education has a more supportive role, a more guiding role, and where necessary a more direct role in ensuring that the boards are functioning properly.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, because what I'm trying - - and I appreciate your comments there because that's exactly where I'm going. I think that there are many schools -- just reading the local newspapers -- that have overspent their budgets, not

## PUBLIC HEARING

reflective of special education issues, reflective of one job classification that does not seem to view the local process of approving budgets as important to stay within the guidelines of, but I also think that -- that we're having a deep misunderstanding of the interconnections of the State Board of Education, local boards of education, how we fit into each other. So, ultimately my goal is to one, I'd like to understand how many schools -- local schools -- are overspending their budgets. We passed as part of the budget last year a mechanism for us to get that information reported to us. we provide some more than \$5 billion dollars in the state budget that goes to municipalities in one fashion or another. That's only in the general fund side of things, and if that money that we're forwarding to the boards of education is not being honored in the manner that it should be, if there's no accountability for that, how are we able to fix the problems?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Right.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): If the problem is not enough funding, we should know that. Is the local municipality not funding that particular board with the correct dollars, or is there no real look at taking advantage of some of the regional opportunities that the state has provided funding for in the form of the -- in our area and now I'm not gonna remember all of the names, but all of the regional organizations that you provide dollars for, you have oversight of -- how are we making sure that the municipalities are taking advantage of some of those things to further the dollars that the state -

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COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Mm-hm.

## PUBLIC HEARING

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Is providing for them. Are we looking at ways to come up with regional curriculum directors if a group of small towns are going to one general high school, and we have nine different curriculum directors? Is there a way that we could provide the resources for schools to act in a more collaborator fashion, and what are we doing when we're noticing a school that is losing so much population that no matter what we give them for dollars on the state side, they're not going to be able to afford a comprehensive education? There was the other night you would have been very proud to see some of the organizations that were here supporting children with music programs and art programs, but I live in the neck of the woods where we cut out music programs, art programs. There is no play activity that happens. Kids are down to less than basic supports for education, and in the rural portions -- and I know it happens in other portions too -- but in the rural portions of the state, there were two superintendents that used to come to see me all the time before I ever sat up here and said the rural part of Connecticut is not receiving the necessary resources to be successful for those children, so I think we need to keep that in mind, and so what I'd like to get back from at the subcommittee level is what are the goals of the State Board of Education, how are we finding out what boards of -- what local boards of education are overbudget, and why were they overbudget? Where they overbudget for special education issues or were they not budgeting correctly for regular education? And, what is the goal of the State Board of Education in oversight of these local boards of education?

## PUBLIC HEARING

Because most recently, the Council of Governors in -  
- in Southeastern Connecticut voted to support  
legislation tamping down on their local boards of  
education. I don't happen to be a member of that  
any longer. I was there when they sent us that  
legislative agenda, but it's not one school any  
longer that is seeing problems with overspending, so  
at the subcommittee level, I'd like to sort of go  
into making sure that we're spending the dollars  
correctly, that there's an oversight over those  
local dollars, and there's an understanding of what  
we can do to make sure that we're taking advantage  
of the regional efforts that we've put so much time  
and -- and money into going where we need to go, so  
those are my concerns.

I already talked to you about the charter schools,  
but that's my secondary concern on local boards.  
Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you,  
madam. The conversation about how do the LEAs work  
within the state, how are they funded, how do we  
hold them accountable for what they should be doing?  
I think those are the conversations, and I know it's  
part of our charter --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Yeah.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So, I don't think we are  
interested in changing the charter, but I think we  
have to figure out how to make it work better, so we  
look forward to that conversation. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Represent -- Representative  
Lavielle.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you, Madam Chair.  
Good morning.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good morning.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Good morning, Senator.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Good morning, Laura.

CHIEF OF STAFF LAURA STEFON: Good morning.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Good to see you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Same here.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I have -- I have a few questions for you, and I'm sorry I missed your testimony, but I did read it since I've been sitting here. My first question far and away is the one that -- that troubles me the most in here, and it's -- it's not something you did. It's something that's in the budget, but I -- I'd like to know your view of it because it's almost -- it's almost scary, which is this cut to bilingual education, but I'm not worried about the cut. I am worried that there wasn't more there in the first place. As you all know -- and this is just I know my part of the state better than I know other parts of the state -- Norwalk is literally exploding with hundreds of children arriving in various waves who are not native English speakers, and yes, the city is kind of shouldering the burden -- the cost of great budget increases locally, and I know that you can't -- that SDE can't be responsible for all of that, but the purpose of this line item is to help with funding and resources, and I'm sure the same thing is going on in a number of other locations. It's not everything. I know it's not everywhere, but we

## PUBLIC HEARING

all know if you don't get to people early enough -- if you do with bilingual education, everybody gets something out of it, everybody learns, and you go along your merry way and people get educated, and if you don't, you've got a very severe problem.

I don't see how the cut's possible, and I -- maybe I sound strange saying this -- but I don't see how it's possible to deal with that -- with this without even having -- I'm sorry. We're on tv here.

[Laughing]. I -- I don't see how it's possible to do it without more money than what we had in the first place. I -- I just -- do you have any view -- any -- any hope for this and -- and how would you -- how would you approach it?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Well, thank you for sharing your concern. We've had conversations about the --

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I know.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Growth in Norwalk, and I know Danbury is in a similar situation. We know servicing the needs of English learners is paramount, that we're not going to address the workforce needs or diversifying our profession if we don't -- like, we're not able to meet the needs of students in our K-12 system. We are moving forward with a position of equity and language that was supported last year by the legislature, so thank you for that, and we are anticipating a more direct connection with all districts, all municipalities on how they're serving English learners, so we look forward to moving forward with the resources that we do have, but I understand your question is, you know, how could those cuts happen, and unfortunately, with this budget, difficult decisions have to be made outside of, you know, my ability to

## PUBLIC HEARING

-- to decide. However, I know that with the budget that we have and the commitment -- commitment that we have from the governor that we're gonna be addressing achievement disparities, including ELS, more aggressively.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Well, and -- and I appreciate your response, and I know it's a major concern of yours and I don't -- I don't attribute this to you in the slightest, but I -- it's -- it's alarming, and I think sometimes it comes from people who haven't been outside the country and don't realize that the United States is trailing every country in the world in terms of language competency, and I mean people who are native English speakers, and the other -- anybody who's skeptical of putting funding into this must realize that by not doing it we are also depriving native English speakers of acquiring a competency that they could have as well, so I'm -- I'm troubled. I -- I would like to see us have a plan that if we -- I'd certainly like to see (inaudible - 00:23:59) restored, but if we -- if we don't do this now, how would we roll it out in future years and -- and really in a big way because it's going to consume us and drown us.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you. I'll move on to the next thing 'cause I think I was pretty clear on that. looking -- looking at [laughing] -- sorry. Looking at -- I know but that was -- that was the big one.

REP. WALKER (93RD): That was a big one.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Yeah, and you know, I am the ranking member, Toni. [Laughing].

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. WALKER (93RD): Are you?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): [Laughing]. Yeah. So, anyway, for ECS, we have the note that -- and we've heard this -- that the funding is being provided to accurately reflect revised ECS data. You don't have to tell us now, but I would like to see for the committees -- for the subcommittees where the variances are.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Okay.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): So that we can actually see what kind of trends we're looking at.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Okay.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: We'll definitely bring that to the boardroom. Thank you.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): The -- there's another one I am acutely aware of -- of the staffing -- the understaffing situation in SDE, and there is a little -- little bit of additional money for -- to folks in curriculum positions, and I would just like to have more detail for the subcommittees about what they are actually going to do. We have made so many -- I mean we've just all torn ourselves apart on curriculum and what the state does and what the local districts do over the past 10 years. From the minute I got here, we were postponing things and rejigging them, and it hasn't stopped, so I just kind of like to know what they're going to do. I don't dispute the need for them, but just to have some further information.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Okay.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I have two more areas here. The -- the reduced funding for the commissioner's network. Is that because we've just found areas of savings? It's -- it's \$250,000 dollars. Is it because we've found places to increase savings or is it because there's actually a reduced need for the activity? If you happen to know now?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: So, we were allowed to have a certain amount of schools, and we didn't have that number of schools, so we were -- so there was that -- that portion that was taken -- that was cut, but it -- it didn't cut the funding of the schools that were in the commissioner's network, so services weren't lost or support wasn't lost to those schools. That was in excess of -- that was made as a result of not having the amount of schools in the commissioner's network that we could have had.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): So, it's actually a good trend or it's we don't have enough money for what we really need to do?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: We -- that number is fluent, right, so you know, we'll see -- we can have more information for you on what the trend might be moving forward with the new accountability system that just came out and the number of schools that are in the commissioner's network moving forward.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay. Thank you, and finally, with the reduction for charter schools which is the -- I'm just referring to the \$1.4 million dollar reduction --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Mm-hm.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): On the closing of the two schools, and the wording we have here is that this

## PUBLIC HEARING

reduction is associated with limiting seat growth -- I don't even understand the preposition here -- associated with limiting seat growth in fiscal year of '21 to approved plans. Does that mean the approved change -- the approved plans changed or it used to be higher than what the approved plans allowed for and we've just reduced it to that level?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: I'm gonna turn it over to Laura to respond specifically on that one.

CHIEF OF STAFF LAURA STEFON: Yeah, I think it's because there were schools that were overenrolling, and so they were actually had more kids at the schools than were in their approved plan, so we communicated to them, I believe, last June what their actual numbers were.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay. Just to -- that just begs the question. So, where do those people go if they -- [chuckling] if they can't be there anymore?

CHIEF OF STAFF LAURA STEFON: These are going to be their funded seats. They can still take the kids if they want to take the kids.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Oh, okay. Okay. Thank you. That's all I have for now, Madam Chair.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you, Representative.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you very much. Thank you all. I mean both of you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Representative Curry.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Not really many questions today, just more comments, and I just want to thank you for your commitment to education for the state of Connecticut and your

## PUBLIC HEARING

staff. As Chair Walker mentioned, SCE has been woefully underprovided with regards to being able to fill certain positions that have been critical in the past and should be critical moving forward, and I think just to kind of give a plug as far as especially around the health and wellness of our students, we know that healthy kids make better learners, and so if we're able to keep them healthy in the classroom, hopefully, we'll have better outcomes thereafter, and so I would just respectfully ask that when you're looking at particular staffing within the state department that we definitely try to put a focus on that because I know that that position actually currently is no longer there.

Having said that, also with regards to the comments that Chair Osten made earlier with regards to oversight with board of educations -- I know she's not here right now -- but I'll be happy to go back and revisit creating our fiscally independent boards of education and separate them completely from our municipalities and have that conversation, which I would love to have and continue to have as far as oversight. With regards to the role in which the State Board of Education plays in this entire process, I think that has been a question of a number of members over the years. Also, as a former board of education member myself, I don't know if we had any sort of interaction with the State Board of Education or if we needed the interaction with the State Board of Education, and I know that there was legislation last year and in the past to take a look at the complete system here in Connecticut to see exactly how that should look, so we may also want to revisit that to see if the structure that we currently have is actually one that we actually need

## PUBLIC HEARING

or is actually working the way in which that we intended it to.

The most concerning I think in here that I saw with regards to the reductions, especially around the afterschool programming. I know that's in communities such as my own in East Hartford and then I represent in Manchester, those are critical for our families, and my question around that would be if we're going to make cuts in that particular area, what is the state department or what is even the governor's proposal for potentially helping out these communities to ensure that these kids have something to do after school to keep them out of any sort of other activities that may harm them in the future?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you for the comments and also for the question. Obviously, any cuts are gonna have an impact somewhere, and -- and when we're talking about education, we're talking about children and their opportunities during school, after school. Very difficult decisions had to be made about the cuts. As districts looked to the districts that are able to benefit from small moderate increases to their ECS, I think it's important that we continue to communicate the message that programming for students outside of school as well or partnerships with agencies in the community that support students after the bell rings should be considered as well, but I appreciate your sentiment and your concern.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and I think the best answer for the after-school question is to say, we'll put the money back. [Laughing]. There you go. Representative McCarty, followed by Representative Candelaria.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Hi. Nice to see you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): And, Laura, it's so nice to see you here today. Many of my questions were posed, but I do want to just echo some of the sentiments that Representative Lavielle expressed about the bilingual education. I know we all agree that that's an important area to continue to observe and do whatever we are able to do, but it brings me to the question as we are going forward. We're looking naturally to close the student achievement gap, and that's been a major concern for all of us, and in this budget, I see there are cuts to the parent trust fund and programs of that sort, and know we need to be creative and innovative in finding ways to continue to support our parents, and I'm wondering if you might not have some thoughts or could provide us with opportunities, creative ways to engage our parents as we're going forward. I think that's going to be an important initiative. So, if you might just comment on that particular area and if you see -- and then I have a few more.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Sure. Thank you for the comment and especially the concern. We agree that a critical component to making sure all children can achieve at their potential is engaging families, especially families that have historically felt un -- disengaged or discounted, if you will. So, our efforts at the agency are going to continue to not only support programs that do do that, but also to foster that culture from our agency that all the work that we do should involve parent engagement. We have a very strong connection with different parent groups within our agency, and we want to see

## PUBLIC HEARING

how we can use that to model good practices in districts, so we remain committed to that. We now have a deputy for educational wellness and support, Charlene Russell-Tucker, and a big part of the work that she's done leading up to her appointment as deputy has been around stakeholder engagement, so that's gonna be a through line in all the work we do moving forward.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): That's very excellent to hear that, thank you. And, if I just may make a comment? I do know that [clearing throat -- excuse me -- that the State Board of Education does put out a five-year comprehensive plan, and it addresses boards of education and best practices, so I just didn't want anyone to go away thinking there isn't synergy between the state board, the local boards, and the legislature, but there may be more work that we can do in that area to continue to increase those relationships.

As far as the ECS goes, I -- I just would like to get your opinion about it. I know that we're looking to, you know, to continue the increases going forward to reach the maximum in the year 2028, but we do have an ECS taskforce that was in place and just wondered if you could give your opinion about are you an advocate for looking back after you led a few years, transpired to see how things are operating. I think you made -- you eluded to that a few moments ago, and just your opinion, do you think it's worthwhile after we legislate to look back at the ECS to see are there any outliers, are there any gaps, is there any way that we could have improved the formula, or do you think we should just leave it alone?

## PUBLIC HEARING

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you for -- for the question. I feel it's -- it's healthy for continuous growth that we always remain reflective and that we structure in reflection in everything we do including the five-year plan that you mentioned, right -- are we hitting our targets, are we holding ourselves accountable, are we squeezing what we can out of every dollar we get? The -- the question before about local boards and the accountability there, I feel strongly that some of the best ways that the agency can support children in the state of Connecticut is to foster effective boards and support them, and then where necessary hold boards accountable to do what they were being asked to do with the money of our taxpayers in Connecticut. It's a really important role, and when it's not done well, we see the effects of that and ultimately, students are in the balance, so critically important that we do that.

With regard to the ECS, I'm pleased that the governor is supporting and continues the -- the funding the way it's moving. It is an equalizer. If you talk to the district I came from one of those districts that relied very heavily on it, and without that, we'd be talking about, you know, which schools were closing, or class sizes of over 30 as an average, so it's critically important that the ECS shift happen, especially for those districts that without that would be hard pressed to find solutions for the families that do live there, but I do welcome the opportunity to constantly reflect on what's working, what's not working, what adjustments have to be made in order so that the growth continues past 2028 for the students of Connecticut.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Well, thank you very much for that answer, and then just finally and I see

## PUBLIC HEARING

superintendent being here with us today, and since you mentioned in your remarks -- if I may -- workforce development and making sure that our students are -- that we're really looking at personalized learning as we go forward and treating all of our students with the education that they need whether they go on to college or stay in the workforce. Could you comment or if you are able to at some point, just let us know what more the traditional high schools might be able to do to help with the tech schools and preparing our students that they're interested in going into the trades, and I know there are a few pilot programs already occurring throughout the state, but I'd be interested to see what more we can do and how the traditional high schools can be of more use.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: We'll definitely send more information, but I will say that Superintendent Wihbey -- I'm surprised he didn't come in with a hard hat. He's been out visiting with so many different -- so many different industry folks and because there's a great need, and I'm glad to see that a big part of the reason why this is happening is his leadership. They're looking at our -- our -- our system -- our CTECS system but also our comprehensive high school system as partners in the process. We have a role here, and we have a very important role, so to your point about the comprehensive high schools -- the traditional high schools, there's a role there, and we have to evolve those as well, and having folks like Superintendent Wihbey at the table helps because he's -- he's kind of leading that with the CTECS system.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): And -- and if I just may, final comment that I'm just so pleased to see the relationship between the tech schools and the

## PUBLIC HEARING

traditional schools, and also with your background coming in --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: (inaudible - 00:39:08).

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Right, so [chuckling].

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: [Laughing].

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): And, I look forward to working with everyone --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): This session.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Candelaria, followed by Representative Rosario.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to -- nice to see you commissioner.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you. Nice to see you too.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): I just want to share some of the same sentiments that some of my colleagues have shared in regards to our relation and oversight of local board of educations. As you've been seeing in many of the districts, you have some of the board of educations that have been operating out of deficit. Yet, there is no oversight from the state. This has to do with the commissioner's network that we have subsequent schools that are not performing. I think we need to distinguish with local board of educations. Those are taxpayer dollars that we need to ensure we're overseeing, and I don't think we do

## PUBLIC HEARING

enough of that, so I just want to make my comments with that.

DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): In regards to bilingual education, thank you for your response. I'm not going to continue with the same issue, but I think it's critical that we analyze those dollars because there is a need in bilingual education, especially when you have a lot of students that are coming from Puerto Rico specifically, who may be in -- in a country not family to themselves, they're dealing with -- with the trauma of the natural disasters on the island, but on top of that coming in and they're thrown into a mainstream classroom and that puts a damper on them because they cannot continue with the education. Some students do not acquire the English language faster than others, so all of those implications play a little role in that, so I hope that as we move forward we'll be able to analyze those dollars.

In regards to the after-school program that cut, I'm just trying -- \$530,000 dollars -- I know that doesn't seem like much, but that is a lot. What was the rationale behind that -- in reducing \$530,000 dollars?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: So, I know that the decision to make cuts are difficult ones. I don't -- I don't suggest that any cut won't have an impact on students, but I think the goal there was to provide a budget that is responsible and reflective of the needs of Connecticut while also being mindful of the, you know, appropriations that are being put out, so.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Okay. Thank you for that answer. And, also one thing that I will ask for you to look at, at some point, is one of the things that I've been hearing throughout the district is that federal law states that any classroom that has more than 20 students that speak a foreign language they need to provide bilingual education.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Mm-hm.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): And, what I've been hearing is that what the local districts are doing instead of having all the students in one classroom, they're just moving them to different mainstream classrooms, avoiding the issue of providing bilingual education. I am a little bit concerned about that.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Mm-hm.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Because it defeats the purpose. At the end of the day, bilingual education is to ensure that our English speak the English language, but trying to avoid that I think puts a different spin on the situation and a hardship on these students as well, so if you will look into that, that will be great, and that's it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Rosario.

REP. ROSARIO (128TH): Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Good morning.

REP. ROSARIO (128TH): Good to see you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Same.

REP. ROSARIO (128TH): I -- Representative Candelaria stole my thunder on the bilingual

## PUBLIC HEARING

education, but I stand completely shoulder-to-shoulder with him on that issue, but I want to talk about the after-school program cut. Just recently, we had an uptick in violence in Bridgeport -- shootings, and we actually had a couple school-aged children that lost their lives due to gun violence, and this governor came to Bridgeport and said, we need to do more to keep kids off the street. This doesn't reflect that. This cut doesn't reflect that, and we need to do better, so that's just my two cents on that.

And, as far as the charter seats, again, once again, these are communities that are black and brown, and it seems like every single time those most vulnerable communities are at the frontline when it comes to the cuts, so I want to continue working with you, your staff, and the governor to make sure that, you know, we do the right thing by our people. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: If I -- Ma'am, can I just comment real quickly?

REP. WALKER (93RD): Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: On a couple comments that were shared by -- by others with regard to Board of Ed Governance. One of the things that I'm proposing actually through a legislative proposal is the support of a district framework to close achievement gaps but also raise the bar, and part of that means that we as an agency need to be more proactively engaged, supportive, and guiding districts and holding folks accountable where it's falling apart around major buckets of work. Board Governance is one of those. I think often times we don't get involved until there is a major problem, and I think we need to stop them. We need to be more assertive

## PUBLIC HEARING

in supporting districts in their growth with Board of Governance. Fiscal health I heard Senator Osten mention fiscal health and several others, so we should -- this framework should include support and guidance and accountability to districts on fiscal health, so we're not waiting for there to be a major cut or a catastrophe in a district for us to get involved. Curricular health is another major bucket of work that we need to be more proactively engaged. I was pleased to hear Representative McCarty talk about the workforce piece. That needs to live there.

So, we do have a plan to move this work forward. We -- I echo those sentiments, and with regard to bilingual education, near and dear to my heart, we need to do -- all teachers are EL teachers. All teachers are teachers of English Learners, so this notion of it living in a pocket needs to change, but we need to do a better job and follow the law with when it comes to what we're doing with bilingual education, and we are going to move forward. As I mentioned earlier, the language and equity position is going to be to work with districts and ensure that the practices follow research and what's best for kids so that those kids have an opportunity to be successful as well.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. I'm just going to let everybody know that I have all the people listed here. It's just that next time I'll say everybody gets two questions, and then they can come back. Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, Madam Chair. Commissioner, over here.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Oh, hi. [Laughing].

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Hello. I did get to meet you in Meriden that day, and I have to say I spoke to a group of superintendents right after you met them. You had their meeting, and boy, you got very high grades on people -- people are very excited about working with you, so -- and so are -- we -- we feel that way also.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): A couple of things I just wanted to ask you. First of all, when you talk about the commissioner's network -- some of us were here when that was formed -- and this information might be out there, and I'm happy to hear that the reason it's being cut is because we have less. Hopefully, that is good news, but we've never really seen how that -- you know, that was what 2012 -- 2013. It would be great to be able to see how we're doing, you know. It was a good idea at the time. We all supported it. I -- I'd just love to know are we going in the right step. That would be great. I'll just piggyback on the comments about the Connecticut Tech Schools and all. You know, when I got here -- the first year I got here we were actually talking. It had been proposed that the tech schools go under their local towns, and thank goodness -- I believe it was a business community that really came and said, wait a minute. You don't realize they're -- they're the answer, and I think of where we come from that conversation to now that we all know that and that you are so proactive with that that I think that is just great news. All of us working together on that, and then these are just a couple comments.

I do have a couple of questions. The minimum budget requirement -- you know for towns like -- I

## PUBLIC HEARING

represent two small towns. One's regional school district, one's not. It would be great if -- and I know there's a staffing issue, and I know you're getting two curriculum people, but when you talk to towns when you're preparing their budget, the first thing they say is -- especially towns that are seeing pretty large decline in enrollment, they don't even come and ask about minimum budget requirement. There is an assumption that it won't be given out, and I think that is something that historically was true. I think it's changed, but it's still not where -- where it should be, and I -- to think that as each town and as you say in your report we understand the ongoing need for fiscal prudence. Smaller towns are having the same problem. As we finally get ECS formula working fairly, a lot of these towns have taken cuts.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Yeah.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): So, they're looking at every dollar, but -- but when they start their budgets, which you know they're right in the middle of right now -- we're getting ready to present them -- to know the number that their minimum budget requirement is, to know the chances that there will be consideration taken for -- for -- especially decline in enrollment because I've talked to districts beyond mine that say they get turned down every year or half the time there's just never any followup, and I know it's always told they don't have staff, but if we're gonna cut these towns with ECS, at least let's work with them with minimum budget requirement. I have a 27 percent declined enrollment in one of my towns, and we have not had one year -- if you take capital out -- we have not had one year that our budget has been flat or gone down, and when you talk to them, it's that

## PUBLIC HEARING

misinformation on minimum budget requirement, and I've been told by pretty -- people that are very involved with CABE, and the shoreline district that it's just don't bother, and -- and I know some efforts have been made over the last couple of years to make it a little better. It's not where it needs to be, so whatever could come out of your office to really guide these towns before they start their budgets to know, you know, what they can expect, I think it would be -- it would really help our local towns to have a great conversation of where they need to be.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): And, then --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Go ahead.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): One other thing. We used to be able to get a report on a per-people expenditure per town, and I think we say that all the time some towns can be spending between state dollars and their private dollars and other grants or whatever some towns can be spending \$25,000 dollars a student, and some could be doing \$9,000 dollars. It would be nice to be able to see what we are talking about. We used to actually get a rating of 169 or whatever the regional and just that would be great, and a formula that's apples-to-apples, you know, that really is a true formula. I think it would give people the idea of what we're talking about of districts that really don't have the resources. All we see is what they get from the state. We don't see the whole thing, and I think it would really, really help us have a better conversation.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Sure.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): If you could provide that, Commissioner --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Yeah.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I think it would be wonderful. Let me just see the last things. My last issue is as we talk -- and I think Senator Osten brought it up -- the relationship with SDE and the local boards. One of my towns is a regional board of -- school system. It's exactly what the goal of the state is. They're doing it right, but there's a third relationship. You've got the state, you've got the Board of Ed, but with Regional Boards of Ed, the towns are totally cut out of it, and several -- a few years ago, we took a midterm -- before you were here obviously -- midterm cut in education, and it was significant to a lot of towns, and it was just a surprise, and I remember the town of Durham -- little Durham -- like every other town, their superintendent -- the first selectman goes to the Board of Ed and says look we've got to find a million dollars or whatever it was. We're gonna work on it on our side. We need you to work on it on your side, and the answer of this Regional Board was no. We were given the money. We don't -- and you know, that's what's discouraging about encouraging regionalization because you take that control away from the towns that are involved. You all of a sudden form a body that almost has power that no other board of ed that I know of would have, and if we want to be regional, then let's get that working right. I don't know if that's a charter thing or a state thing, but I remember so many towns took that cut, found ways to do it, and worked together. It did not happen here, and only because of ways setting up with the power of a regional -- a regional board. It's just I don't know if that

## PUBLIC HEARING

comes from your office, Commissioner, or where, but it would be great if we could at least look at that.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Definitely. So, if I could comment on those things. I appreciate that sentiment that you know we also have to be good partners with our municipal leaders, and let's face it, if half of the budget that they have goes to education, there has to be ongoing dialogue. What we're trying to do at the agency to promote that is foster conversation throughout the year -- not just during budget time -- with boards of education leaders and municipal leaders. Just two days ago, I had a conversation with someone who happens to be a town manager and a board of education chair in a different community, so we're going to try to foster some relationships so that we can talk about positive relationships, how to work together so that it's not an advisory role because at the end of the day if you look at a good K-12 -- PreK-12 education, that's your best economic driver, right, so we have to be talking a little bit more.

I'll be quick because you mentioned different things. The education as I mentioned as an economic driver, we need to connect to Connecticut's needs much more explicitly. I think the data of PreK-12 living outside of what the economic needs in Connecticut are and the workforce needs have ended. We really have to move forward aggressively on that, and then lastly, the commissioner's network. You are absolutely right. Some of the best things going on are as a result of the work you did to establish the commissioner's network. Kids life trajectories are changing because of the commissioner's network, and the fact that you haven't seen that -- and I want you to see that. I've been fortunate to see how students are now achieving at high levels,

## PUBLIC HEARING

thinking about college because they were in a school that was supported through the commissioner's network, and traditionally in those schools the students didn't have those thoughts, so thank you for bringing that up. We'll definitely do it.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Well, thank you, and I think we all would like to see it. I'm sure there's some that have, but I haven't. I don't represent one of those towns, but I'll take -- it was at the time it seemed like such a great idea, and it would be great to be able to have this conversation, and just to end it, you know, when we redid the ECS formula it was in bipartisan manner a couple of years ago, a lot of our towns, you know, were getting -- you know, they're being cut, but I really do believe in this state, the towns that were being cut they can -- can find a way to afford it, make it work, would do it if they could see where -- where this money's going, what -- what's happening because of it, and I -- I just think it's -- we're all in this together, and we all know that needier communities need more funds, and we understand that, so I think the more information we get the conversation just changes --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Absolutely.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): And, it's better, but thank you. I'm looking forward to working with you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. I'm just going to let everybody know that we have another five minutes, and then we are cutting into Commissioner Bye's time, but that's okay because we have a lot of questions with education, so we'll [clearing throat]

## PUBLIC HEARING

get that. On -- on deck, I have Representative Johnson, Representative Porter, Representative Hall, and Representative Abercrombie -- nope. Okay. There's -- yay. One down. And, then Representative Currey as a second go-around, so please let's be conscious of the time. Representative Johnson.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thank you so much for your testimony and being here today, and your willingness to work on all the issues that people have described, and so in the interest of time, I'll just tell you where I'm coming from, and you can answer whatever time allows, but first of all, I'm really happy to see that the education cost-sharing formula is being addressed and it's continued in this particular budget by the governor. I have a district that was underfunded for numerous years. We were around 72 percent of ECS, and then we went -- as we've been increasing now, we're getting a little bit more of ECS. We have referendum towns, so whenever the budget goes out, people vote on it, and people that -- that usually the education budget goes up for two or three rounds on that, and it really gets in the way of some of the goals and opportunities that we want to have.

Also, I have an educational opportunity -- high school educational opportunity and some of that funding was cut, so we're not getting full associates degrees for those students, and we've had about 35 or 40 students a year for the last four or five years. It's been a very excellent program. I'd like to see that continued.

With respect to bi -- bilingual education, I'm more in favor of a dual-language program. I think that they're more effective. I -- we have one in my

## PUBLIC HEARING

district, and it's -- the students that are in that particular program are scoring very well on their tests, and there may be some limitations that bilingual education does even though it's absolutely necessary. I'd like to see us move more towards dual-language and have us go through a situation where we're providing opportunity or choice, creating a choice school that would be dual-language choice schools that might help do regionalization and also take care of the language issues that our students have more and more every single year, so I think that they are very, very good.

Also, I want to speak in favor of -- of -- I have a tech school in my district, so I'd love to make sure that the tech schools are fully staffed, and they are doing more corporative things between the tech schools and the high schools in a regional way. I think that that would be very, very helpful, so.

And, finally, the before and after-school programs are very essential, and we were cut, and I couldn't figure out why my district was cut when we have some of the poorest students in the entire district with families that everybody wants to encourage to stay employed; how do they do that without a good before and after-school program and also how do they do that without creating access for the people who -- who need that? So, I want to see that, especially for alliance districts, though of and considered when you look at these cuts because it doesn't seem to me that that would be the -- the -- the right way to go, and we have a very high population also of homeless students. We have the shelter. We have three shelters in my district -- the Holy Family Shelter, which takes care of the families, and we have a domestic violence shelter, and we also have a

## PUBLIC HEARING

no-freeze shelter, but I don't think that would apply to the education situation, so.

Anyway, thank you for your work, and I look forward to working with you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Porter.

REP. PORTER (94TH): Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome, Commissioner Cardona. Great to see you, and I do realize the time constraints that we have, and I'm not usually one to belabor the issue, but I have to say that education is one that I'm going to belabor over and over and over until we get what I feel is equitable education, and this budget does nothing by the means of that. You know, you spoke about the Board of Governance and a proposal to close the achievement gap, which to me is not an achievement gap. It's an opportunity and resource gap, and when you say that and you say that education is fundamental and a key indicator for future success, an economic driver, this budget says the total opposite, so it's hard for me to believe, you know, what we say as a body -- not just you, you know. I'm going to put myself in this as well. It's a group effort. It should be a collective effort, but it doesn't feel like it because everything that we're doing actually is the opposite, you know. We are cutting after-school programs. You know, my colleagues have talked about that, and we know that after school they boost academic progress. They keep kids out of trouble. They provide a safe instructed environment, and they also take care of the kids while most parents -- Representative Johnson, my district, and other districts are usually very poor districts. Parents are working two and three jobs, so we talk about

## PUBLIC HEARING

what my grandmother used to point is idle time is the devil's playground, and then we criminalize these kids, right, and we put them in school, and we like to call it if they're not reading by third-grade level it's gonna be hard for them to learn to read -- not impossible, but very hard for them to learn to read as an adult, so we're graduating illiterate kids in my district. I have sixth graders reading on a Kindergarten level, and then we're taking \$20 million dollars and matching (inaudible - 01:01:05) who's gonna address kids in high school, which to me is a moot point because that's not when they need the help. They need the help from the ground up, and it need -- we need to make this connection, and we need to validate and do things that speak to what we say, right. I've had somebody say to me, I can't believe what you say because I see what you all doing, and they're talking about this budget, and I have to own this, and I'm fighting for these things, and I just want to stress to you as the commissioner to -- to use your power to do what you can do to make sure that we're not just talking the talk, we're walking the walk because if our kids cannot read, they can't do nothing, and they can't compete. We talk about losing business and jobs that we can't fil. You want to know why? Because we are not addressing the needs of a huge population of kids that are in dire need of equity and education. We must level the playing field. We have to give them the resources that they need, the opportunities that we need.

Nobody talked about the cut that we're doing to the parent trust fund. I mean all of this goes hand-in-hand, and if parents are not civically engaged and civically educated and skilled around how to advocate for their kids -- you know, my kids are in

## PUBLIC HEARING

school, my thing to the teacher is this a corporation. It's me, you, and my kids, and this is a business we're building, and these kids are not gonna have a future if we're not really, you know, doing what we need to do to make it happen, and I'm just really frustrated and -- and not directed at you but at this budget and what is this saying to the state of Connecticut and to constituents like mine and Representative Johnson's and many others? That we talk a good game, but we have not positioned the players to succeed, so no questions. Just really -- just -- just venting, and --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you.

REP. PORTER (94TH): And -- and making a plea to you to please, you know, work with us and the governor's office to change some of what's been done here.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you for your passion. I look forward to working with you.

REP. PORTER (94TH): Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Hall.

REP. HALL (59TH): Welcome, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Hi.

REP. HALL (59TH): Good morning.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Good morning.

REP. HALL (59TH): I think it's still morning. Yeah. [Laughing]. For now. A couple -- couple quick comments, and then just one question. So, first, I'd like to applaud the governor for the budget in keeping the ECS formula where it was

## PUBLIC HEARING

initially placed with our -- our budget initiative a couple years ago. I think -- and I've said this to my district, and I've made it clear right across the board, I think the fact that this governor has stood by his statement that he's going to not cut our education dollars for ECS should not go unnoticed. As you're well aware, last year's budget and the year before, we had arbitrary cuts mid-year to districts that just devastated budgets. So much so that some of the towns needed to send out supplemental tax bills to make up for those huge cuts that we endured under Governor Malloy, so I have to applaud Governor Lamont with his initiative to keep ECS and education whole.

So, with that being said, a couple of quick questions. I kind of would just like your thoughts on special education funding. So, as we know, special education funding is one of our biggest issues with the districts with it being underfunded year after year, so I'd love to hear from your office, Commissioner, on any sort of initiatives that you have in mind or any direction that may help the districts with their special education funding.

Also, another issue I know we had locally is when we have returning students from CREC schools or charter schools that come back after the deadline in October and the funding is lost for that year. We are finding locally that we are getting more and more students back in district from the CREC schools, so those budget -- those numbers that are budgeted for those students, of course, those dollars are not following the students, so more questions --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Okay.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. HALL (59TH): On some of the initiatives that you may be looking at and again, a compliment to the governor on keeping our ECS dollars where they are.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. HALL (59TH): So, thank you, Commissioner --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. HALL (59TH): For being here. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Currey.

REP. CURREY (11TH): For the second time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): I didn't say. [Laughing].

REP. CURREY (11TH): [Laughing]. I -- I saw it in your eye. There was a press conference recently with regards to education issues. What they brought out was like financial literacy and a number of other different things, but I think the part of the conversation was around some sort of like a model curriculum, and I know -- and it's unfortunate that I don't have additional allocations being provided for SDE to be able to have that conversation and make that development. Is there any sort of desire or internal wants to -- to do this moving forward?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you for the question. The positions that were included in the budget, which are new positions to the State Department of Education -- I can't recall the last time that new positions were added -- were explicitly to address the fact that we need to have a more of a stronger stance on quality curriculum and quality curriculum implementation, so those

## PUBLIC HEARING

positions are going to be intended to do some of that work that you brought up.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Specifically, for the development of a model curriculum?

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Likely with those two positions, they will be working with the resources throughout our state to see which model curriculum works, which brain works, and it certainly wouldn't be a here's a curriculum, you have to implement it, but for those districts that we -- we know exist, they -- you know, different districts are working on the same problem and not talking to each other.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Mm-hm.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Those roles are to make sure that we're bringing people together to create a quality curriculum whether it's developed in my offices or in the districts with our support is yet to be determined.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Okay. Well, I -- I hope we can kind of just continue that conversation, and again, I'll just kind of echo what Representative Porter was discussing with regards to the way this budget kind of looks with regards to education and the lack of true support, but again, I appreciate --

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Yeah.

REP. CURREY (11TH): Your support, and I would just hope that your boss be better. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and that is the last of them, but I thank you, sir. I just want to give a little bit of a wrap-up so that we make sure we have the same takeaways. We want to have a

## PUBLIC HEARING

discussion in the groups about special ed and how that plans in -- in the different districts, and are there things in there that we should be looking at, evaluating, or changing?

After school -- how is that dollar -- that line items dispersed. I have this bad feeling that part of the cut is going to be attributed to it wasn't dispersed out, which is what I'm going to hear about a lot of achieved savings lines in this budget, and so we're going to find out why they were not dispersed, so we want to make sure of that.

And, the bilingual language -- bilingual language need so that we can get rid of that cap and so that we can utilize the dollars that we desperately need out in the community. That has to be addressed.

The charter schools -- we want to know what are the seats that the charter schools should be getting? What were they contracted to do, and if they were contracted to do let's say up to a fifth grade, and they want to add a sixth grade, then that has to be an addendum, but that does not mean that it's not something obviously that needs to happen because they have students that are going to be graduating into the sixth grade, so we want to make sure we -- we capture all of the seats that are necessary because everybody understands these are public schools, and as public schools, we have to address the needs for all our public schools.

One thing that I did not hear but I'm sure I will hear as soon as I bring the word up is magnet schools. We need to know how we are going to go forward with the ruling on the Sheff v. O'Neill, how are we going to utilize those rulings with our magnets now? Because if we don't, then one of the districts will come and sue right behind Hartford,

## PUBLIC HEARING

and we do not want that. We do not want another suit. We want to have equitability in education throughout the state, so social economic isolation needs to be a definition that is shared by all.

The -- let's see, the last one -- I got the after school -- oh, the commissioner's network that you addressed, but we will -- we will want to see exactly what ones.

The parent trust fund -- that we need to know what was that serving because we want to continue it.

And, the last one that was not mentioned was the reading pilot. I didn't hear it, but I know my colleagues have all talked about it. These are things that they've all talked to me about, so I've got them highlighted in my book, but that reading pilot needs to get rid of the word pilot, and it needs to be implemented, not eliminated because we have been told by the school districts it is successful. It's pathetic that they would cut out something that other schools have already told us that it's -- that it was successful. Sometimes we know how to educate our kids better than some other people. We won't say anything.

And, the other one -- the final one is the American School for the Deaf. The cut to that. If I -- our conversations that we've had with the American School for the Deaf, the main thing that we heard was that there was some limitations in what can be achieved through the funding for the state, and part of the -- the concern is that they were not able to again access those dollars because of the way it was defined, so we need to make sure that we provide that so that they can have it, and I think that's a few for now. So, thank you, sir, and thank you for -- for spending time with us today, and -- and you

## PUBLIC HEARING

know, I just want to make sure everybody understands this budget was before your time, and this is a work in progress. This is the governor's perception of what needs to happen, and obviously, you've heard that we have a different perception, so we will look forward to the negotiations with you. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DR. CARDONA: Thank you very much.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Next, we have the Department of Office of Early Childhood Education.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Good morning.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good morning, Commissioner.  
[Laughing].

COMMISSIONER BYE: Good morning, Representative.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, so at the end of this, we'll -- we'll have to say -- decide which is worse -- on that side or this side. [Laughing]. Now, the good thing is it's all friends. We're all friends, and again, I -- I appreciate everything that you're doing, and I want again stress to my colleagues that the budget before us there may be some reductions that philosophically were not yours, but this is needed according to the executive office in order to achieve savings for something that I'm not sure what we're doing for, but whatever. Commissioner [laughing] - Commissioner Bye. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Thank you, Representative Walker, Senator Osten, Senator Formica's not here right now, but representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Beth Bye. I'm the Commissioner at the Office for Early Childhood. I'm here today to testify concerning the governors '20-'21 proposed budget for the agency.

## PUBLIC HEARING

At OEC, our office advances a two-gen family-centered approach in our pursuit for optimal health, safety, and learning outcomes for young children. Through our programs, we support infant/toddler care, preschool, after-school care, childcare, and camp licensing, home visiting, early intervention to address developmental delays, and OEC is working toward better coordinated cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and their families.

When I talk about what we do at OEC, I want to take a minute here to thank the staff at OEC. I have been so impressed with the folks who work for me, both leaders, right down to every member working hard. Just thinking about getting ready for today how many people stayed late, came early, worked on a holiday to make sure I was prepared and represent their work. Also, to thank our partner agencies. We don't do this work alone. It's hundreds and hundreds of childcare programs, Birth-to-Three providers, home visiting providers, whom not only do the work for us but fundraise on the side to stay afloat as they want to serve children and families in Connecticut, so I just want to make sure that I thank my team at OEC and our partner agencies. This budget continues to invest in high-quality early childhood education. It represents a continuing vestment in early childhood education. I'm going to try to summarize as I go versus read it all, but I know you'll have questions. I know what it used to be like over there. [Laughing].

We increased Birth-to-Three funding almost \$300 million dollars to deal with increasing referrals and increasing services. This is an entitlement program in Connecticut, and it's critical that it's funded to help young children with disabilities.

## PUBLIC HEARING

This budget restored \$1.3 million dollars in the early head-start/childcare partnership program that was slated to sort of fade away. The governor recognized the critical nature of these wrap-around services for families. This particular model is at a team in Naugatuck Lulac Head-Start, New Haven, and the United Way of Greater New Haven, and is really serving as a model for us as we look at systems development because they combine quality improvement with providing full bay services so parents can work, and without this, we would have lost 99 slots. This budget delays the increase in the school readiness rates, and also delays the rate parity that was planned for CDCs in the state. The OEC recognized that that funding is critical, and this was a difficult decision in a difficult budget.

There are two other cuts. One to Ed Advance, which was a small grant to Ed Advance. That was cut, but that was important to Ed Advance, and I think represents some of the challenges we're seeing as I look at the system and that our school readiness councils that administer programs with many, many other programs, and look to improve the quality have very minimal overhead, and so these dollars were to help them with some special programs.

We also cut the scholarship line by \$600,000 dollars, which provides scholarships to early childhood educators in Connecticut. We are able to use federal funds for this purpose, and with the increasing federal dollars in Care for Kids, they're increasing requirements for spending a certain proportion of that on quality, so we felt that this was a cut we could absorb. We don't believe it will reduce -- well, we know it won't reduce the scholarship funds going out to providers.

## PUBLIC HEARING

Also, wanted to mention we were successful in getting the preschool development grant to help us with system buildings and support professional development.

And, in closing, I'd just like to thank you, and I'm really happy to answer questions. I think that's where most of the information comes out. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you -- thank you, madam, and thank you for your work, and thank you for your commitment to our kids -- our children. That's the most important part. I'm going to do my two questions. Let me just say that real clear to everybody.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Did you say two? [Laughing].

REP. WALKER (93RD): I said, two questions, and I will then turn it over to someone else because I think it's important that all our colleagues have a chance to get a couple questions in because even if there is redundancy. My first question is the -- the cut to Care for Kids \$600,000 dollars. The writeup for it says to achieve savings. What does that do if we cut that \$600,000 dollars?

COMMISSIONER BYE: That \$600,000 dollars was the cut to the scholarship fund, which we are able to absorb using federal CCDF funds.

REP. WALKER (93RD): You are able to serve the same amount of people that you would have serviced --

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes.

REP. WALKER (93RD): With the \$600,000 dollar cut?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. WALKER (93RD): With other funding?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. We are -- because of the change when we got the additional \$14 million dollars in Care for Kids, it increased our expenses that we need to spend on quality, and we consider scholarship to be --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Quality.

COMMISSIONER BYE: On quality improvements.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Excellent.

COMMISSIONER BYE: So, those scholarships will -- we also have set aside funds in the preschool development grant, so we fully expect there will be more scholarship dollars in the year ahead than there were last year.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Excellent. That's -- that's wonderful to hear, and then the other question that I had was -- somebody else will ask that one. I'll go to my next. The -- the -- the program of All Our Kin, they were concerned that there was a reduction in their line items, which was going to reduce their access, and everybody knows all over the state what fabulous job All Our Kin does. Can you tell me what the status is and how are we addressing that?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. I appreciate that, Representative Walker. The chance to talk about our work too with Staff Family Childcare Networks. You and I had had a conversation, and I reached out to All Our Kin to understand their concern. They are tireless advocates for small businesses for access to early childhood education where families are because transportation is such a barrier, so both All Our Kin and other -- we fund seven other Staff Family Childcare Networks in the state. What they

## PUBLIC HEARING

do for people -- that might not know -- is we put the funding into networks that grow family childcare providers that help them get licensed. Across the country, we've lost almost 40 percent of family childcare homes over the past 10 years, and they're providing such critical care, and so All Our Kin is really an innovator, sort of a New Haven innovation where they support family childcare providers through the licensing process, and then go out and provide coaching. They help network to make sure there's subs so even if the family childcare provider is sick the parent can get to work, and they build business skills with these small businesses that are critical that both receive money and keep it in the neighborhood, so we are looking to expand our base of family childcare networks. Senator Osten and I have had a conversation 'cause she's really concerned about Electric Boat and the new workers who are needing childcare, so we are seeing about developing Staff Family Childcare Network in that region to take advantage of a lot of military families who could really benefit from that, so what All Our Kin was concerned about -- to get to the issue at hand just so -- 'cause I think the public doesn't understand, but they're really -- we're increasing the base of family childcare providers in the state, and we plan to continue that, and All Our Kin not only does their own program, but often their support to these other networks that are starting up 'cause they provide technical assistance as well.

So, the cut to the early head-start childcare partnership would have impacted All Our Kin because of the wrap-around services that they provide for head-start families and for some of the infant/toddler -- early head-start's infant/toddler

## PUBLIC HEARING

head-start, so that those funds have been restored here. They were cut in last year's budget, but they're back in, and they're back in at a higher rate to actually meet the -- the census of kids in the program this year, so we were able to work with early head-start and Lulac to restore those --

REP. WALKER (93RD): So, the cut -- so just quickly. The cut of \$1.6 million dollars to the early care and education is -- is not going to be affecting this population? It's the restoration that is in --

COMMISSIONER BYE: The restoration impacts.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay.

COMMISSIONER BYE: We would have no way of knowing that because it just --

REP. WALKER (93RD): It doesn't make sense.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Right.

REP. WALKER (93RD): No.

COMMISSIONER BYE: It's not stated in there --

REP. WALKER (93RD): No.

COMMISSIONER BYE: But I think if you think of All Our Kin as almost providing infrastructure across a number of programs a lot of their dollars come out of the quality line that I --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. All right. I -- I just want to make sure because I want to remind everybody that our goal is to support business. Again, business comes in a lot of shapes and sizes, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a manufacturer or something like that. It can be a -- a different -- a homecare program or something like you know the

## PUBLIC HEARING

things that we have been talking about, so thank you very much for that.

All right, so we go onto Represent -- I mean Senator Osten, and I just want to remind everybody two questions, and I will turn the microphone off.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Whew, she's so mean! [Laughter]. She's really, really mean. And, people thought it was me, but it's really her. [Laughing]. [Background conversing]. So, I really appreciate you bringing up Electric Boat. Where are we on looking at childcare for the -- that region of the state? As you know, the former president of Electric Boat said that in one -- one year with all of the new workers -- there were 200 something new babies born, which means we're going to head into early childcare very soon.

COMMISSIONER BYE: You are. So, as I -- as I mentioned to Representative Walker, we are expanding how we are -- what we are calling Staff Family Childcare Networks to expand childcare in what are childcare deserts. Out by Electric Boat, there is a just no childcare available --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Correct.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Because of Electric Boat, and you brought me out to see Electric Boat. They also came to a regional conference with us to talk about the childcare shortages and what it means for businesses in New England when we went to Providence with them, so we are developing a request for proposal now -- 'cause that's how we have to put these dollars out on the street -- for that region of the state, and my guess is it'll be -- it's probably another six weeks before it can hit the streets, but we've been developing it for a period of time. It's just there

## PUBLIC HEARING

are a lot of steps it has to go through, but we have the dollars set aside to add additional Staff Family Childcare Networks, and we're targeting them at regions that face childcare deserts, which there's a childcare desert -- even though it's a populated area -- there's a lack of childcare.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you, and I would say that some of our empty schools may provide good locations for new childcare development areas. I know that there's at least one in Groton. My second question is around a different part of the state, and that is down in Senator Leone's area -- the Children's Learning Center. Have we figured out their funding sources down there?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. The Children's Learning Center is a -- is a fantastic program piloting some model practices around social-emotional health with a ruler from Yale, and also providing professional development to their region. They have opportunities to bid on some quality improvement RFPs, one that just went out, and we're to contract. I don't believe they bid on that one, but there will be an additional RFP for Staff Family Childcare Networks in Stamford, which is another area, again, populated, but a lot of parts of the city there -- there aren't access to that.

The other thing you might have heard me mention that early head-start wrap-around is a real model that exists in New Haven and Naugatuck, and one of the reasons we wanted to keep funding as we look to improve the whole system that is an area where I think we should be looking to leverage federal dollars that are paying for where the children are, and then with some state dollars creating the care that parents need so they can work, and their early

## PUBLIC HEARING

head-start provider in Stamford as well, so both a Staff Family Childcare Network could help them extend the day, but it could also because of their high-quality professional development, they would certainly have an opportunity to apply to support family childcare centers in the Stamford region, so there are opportunities for them as well.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you, so when you come back or when Staff comes back I would appreciate them bringing us what areas of the state that you have identified as childcare deserts.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So, that we know that we're putting the dollars in the right place.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): On the Children's Learning Center where they are in their funding, I am still seeing that they may need more funding to be as successful as they have been. I'd like to understand that a lot more.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Mm-hm.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And, what your proposal is for Southeastern Connecticut. I know everybody else will cover some of the other areas that we have, but those would be my asks for when you come back to the table.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank -- thank you very much, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Let me just let everybody know two questions. Thank you, Senator

## PUBLIC HEARING

Osten, and in line, we have Representative Lavielle, Representative Candelaria, Representative Hall, Representative Johnson. If I missed anybody, please just let me know, and I'll put you down. Okay. [Background conversing] [Laughter]. Thank you. Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you, and I have only one question. Yay. Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Good morning.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Good to see you in here again.

COMMISSIONER BYE: You too.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I -- I just have my question regards the Birth-to-Three program.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Which, you know, I've -- it's not the funding I have a problem with. I don't. The it's being increased because we're -- we're told here that there -- there's an increase in caseload and so on, which providers tell me it's true. I am very interested to know more about the -- the RFP that was recently issued to providers because a number of them have spoken to me with great concern on, I guess, mostly two levels. There are others. The first concern is that there -- as a result of the RFP, there's seems to have been a reduction in the number of providers that for clients means a different geographical spread. A lot of people are not going to be able to find a provider in their area because there seems to have been -- and I -- I ask this somewhat as a question -- but there seems to have been a type of consolidation, and the second part and then I'll --

## PUBLIC HEARING

I'll shut up. The second part is that the -- some -  
- some providers went in for follow up interviews to  
find out why they weren't chosen, and they had been  
providers for a long time, had received good  
ratings, and so on, and they discovered that they  
were told by the folks they spoke to that for  
example the quality of their work was not a factor  
in how they were evaluated, so there were a number  
of concerns on those levels, and so I just -- I just  
wondered if you had any comments today? We can  
pursue it more in the subcommittees.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): That's my question.

COMMISSIONER BYE: I definitely have some comments  
today, and I have my Birth-to-Three director and  
legal counsel here if I need more details then you  
have. We went out to RFP for Birth-to-Three. It  
had been seven years. We have some long-time Birth-  
to-Three providers who were not awarded the  
contract. I went through the scoring before,  
during, and after the RFP was awarded. What  
happened is a provider would come in and say, I am  
asking for these towns. It could have been three  
towns. It could have been 30 towns. How many towns  
you asked for did not impact your score. The score  
was a function -- you got a score. The higher your  
score, the more of the communities you asked for,  
you received, so if you got the highest score and  
you asked for 15 towns, you may well have gotten  
those 15 towns. If you had sort of a middling score  
and you had asked for 15 towns, you might get four  
of those towns. Our job was to make sure every town  
in the state had a Birth-to-Three provider who  
parents could find. It's difficult when you go to  
RFP there are winners and losers, but OPM has been

## PUBLIC HEARING

cleared to us as commissioners that we want a fair process. We want to go to the -- we want to go to RFP more often than we have, and as you said, many high-quality providers did not receive the grant. No one's saying they weren't high-quality providers, but in the application process, they did not score well, which did include some quality ratings, so it -- it was complicated scoring rubric, and I reviewed the appeals, and in every case, it was clear that even on the items that the were appealing, even if we removed that, the same provider would have received the community's that were received, so when there was a question about a certain item, it said, well you shouldn't have counted this this way. It gave me a zero, we should have had a five. When we went back and looked to see if it changed the scoring, it did not.

So, we did our best to put out a fair process, programs applied, programs scored higher than others, and that's how we awarded. It wasn't an attempt to like consolidate the state into three providers at all. It was if somebody asked for a lot of towns, they had to show they had the capacity and they got the highest score; they got the most towns. What we're trying to do is provide the highest quality services for the children and families who are in Birth-to-Three. I -- I don't think there's a more important program in Connecticut. I don't think there's a program that has higher customer reviews than Birth-to-Three.

One of our challenges is helping families transition from Birth-to-Three to the public schools where they don't feel that same level of engagement with the families, and Representative McCarty did some really important work last year having us look critically at that. I am happy to go deeper with you or meet

## PUBLIC HEARING

with you or if other people have questions about this, but I am telling you as commissioner having reviewed the process deeply, reviewed the appeals, it's really hard. It was really hard for our office. It's much easier to say, here have another year, but we've been pushed, and I think fairly to go to RFP, and -- and we're always looking to improve our RFP process, and now we're going to RFP with home visiting, and we have a lot of structure around that, and we're taking a learning from the Birth-to-Three RFP into account, but these things just -- just how it goes. I don't know if that answers your question, or -- I'll look at my staff. Did I cover the main point?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Well, and I thank -- and I thank you for that. I think we can go into the details in the -- in the subcommittee.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): May I just ask you how many providers you ended up with?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Mm-hm. [Pause]. [Counting to self]. We ended up with 18, but we put offers out to 21 because let's say you applied for 17 towns, and we offered you two, and you say, not worth the infrastructure for me to do two towns, so then we would go back and find someone else to cover those towns, so there were 18 offered.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you, and I -- I do applaud the RFP -- I mean having an RFP process. We should do more of that.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Right.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): In all branches of the government. The -- but there were some -- some

## PUBLIC HEARING

notable concerns. One of them was yes, people in a certain area might be getting a provider. I mean they are getting a provider, but it's -- it's very far away at this stage, you know. Things like that, but also some of the -- I would be interested in knowing more about the criteria that were used --

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): And how the evaluations were done, and --

COMMISSIONER BYE: And, if you'd like -- 'cause my guess is there are questions -- a lot of questions about this.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Mm-hm.

COMMISSIONER BYE: We could type up a one-pager that just says what are the -- what were the criteria, what was the process, and bring that to the subcommittee. Would that be helpful?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): That would be very helpful. Thank you, and -- and we'll see if there's other questions at that time.

REP. WALKER (93RD): That was going to be my wrap-up takeaway is that you guys can bring -- so -- so that would help.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Representative Candelaria, followed by Representative Hall, followed by Representative Johnson, followed by Representative Kokoruda, followed by Representative McCarty, followed by Representative Rosario. Does everybody get the point? [Laughing].

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): How are you, Commissioner?  
Thank you, Madam Chair. Keeping it in my two  
questions.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): I'm gonna follow the same  
line of questioning that Representative Lavielle  
had.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Because I've -- I've heard  
also from one of the providers within my district  
who wasn't chosen. So -- and we don't have to talk  
about it now, but I would like to know who was  
awarded --

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): The bid and how many were  
from Connecticut, and how many were from out of  
Connecticut?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure. I'm happy to do that. I  
believe we have one from out of Connecticut. I'm  
looking. Was there more than one from out of  
Connecticut? More than one? Okay. There is more  
than one. I'll get you that.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): And, also --

COMMISSIONER BYE: The vast majority were  
Connecticut, though.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): The vast majority. And,  
also at the consequence of this rebid -- or the RFP  
process, how many of those current providers will  
have to shut their services?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure. I can --

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): If they weren't awarded, so I would like to know that information as well.

COMMISSIONER BYE: I can get you that.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Perfect.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): Thank you. And, the other quick thing is the delay of the rate increases for the providers. What was the rationale behind that piece, if you have an answer to it? Because my concern is that -- as you know this very well -- the providers have been expecting this rate increase. Many of those providers left their jobs looking for better opportunities, and many of them had been standing there with their current pay, and I know that has been a concern for years, specifically to Representative Sanchez, so I would like to know a little bit more about that. What was the rationale behind it? You don't need to tell me right now.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yeah.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): You can -- in the workgroup we can talk about it.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure. I mean I would just say quickly it was a difficult budget decision that was made.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hm.

COMMISSIONER BYE: And, we understand that these are critical dollars for providers.

REP. CANDELARIA (95TH): All right. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And, we have -- we have a huge deficit we've been told. Representative Hall.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. HALL (59TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. More along the lines of what our good chair started with as far as the Care for Kids line item cuts, and already I've had folks reach out from my district concerned about those dollars. For the working group, can you bring something that shows -- and from what we understood from our previous presentation -- on this particular item there were federal dollars that we received, and I believe for the last two years that were significant increases in Early Childhood dollars from the federal government, so just for the working group where those federal dollars were allocated along these lines, how much came into these particular line items that we're looking at cuts for, so really how it impacts this budget for us. We don't see those federal dollars that you see distributed through your budget, so for the working group that would be my one ask, so.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. HALL (59TH): Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Happy to do that.

REP. HALL (59TH): Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, Representative Hall. That was fabulous. Yeah, hint, hint. [Laughing]. Representative Johnson, did you get the hint? Okay. [Laughing].

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Oh, I did fine. [Laughing]. Thank you so much for your information and your work, and I want to first thank you very much for your work on the two-generational family-centered approach. This is something I think is really valuable, and I'm really appreciative of the fact

## PUBLIC HEARING

that you're doing that work. Also, congratulations on the preschool development grant that seemed to be a great thing that your agency has been working on and really done a good job with. My question you don't have to answer today, but I want to know what the enhanced screening is for the -- that the Birth-to-Three groups are using to make sure that they are able to identify young babies and -- and the toddlers for special needs that really will help us with special education down the road, so whatever you can provide me for that information, and whether or not it's been distributed. Are those practices now being practiced all throughout the state would be very, very helpful, so?

COMMISSIONER BYE: So, just to be clear.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Sure.

COMMISSIONER BYE: You want -- you want us to bring you a description of the screening that we're doing with children birth to three for our Birth-to-Three program and any enhancements to that?

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Yes. Yep.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Okay.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): And, see if it -- and make sure that we know if it's being applied in all of the programs and what the standards are for the making sure that they are, how you know that.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Well, Representative Johnson, one thing I'll tell you that -- that we've been able to do using the preschool development grant, is we do know that children of color are identified later than Caucasian children when it comes to Autism, and we're working with CCMC using preschool development grant dollars to try to address this and pilot

## PUBLIC HEARING

addressing this problem because we know how important early intervention is for Autism. So, I will bring you a description of that project that we're working with CCMC on, but also other screening tools that we're using, but we do know that there's an equity issue in access to Birth-to-Three, and that's one place that we've clearly identified it with the data, so any others that people hear -- hear about or know about, we want to address that.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you very much for that, and the other one would be language because --

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): It fits in with two-gen, but it also could be applicable to the Birth-to-Three, so.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, Madam Chair. I have one brief, brief question, and it's really more of an overview question -- and thank you for being here. It's good to see you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: You too.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): With the Birth-to-Three -- well, actually with all your programs as we see statewide a decline in enrollment. You know, I just happen to live in a couple of towns that are really seeing it, but it's all towns, it's statewide. I know there are pockets that -- you know as Norwalk. You heard about Norwalk, but the need for what your

## PUBLIC HEARING

department provides is growing, and I would assume it's growing because of better diagnoses. Also, that the -- was identified and you were one of the leaders with this and how important early childhood prevention -- not prevention but involvement is with -- with these programs, but with the decline in enrollment throughout the state, are you seeing anything that you could tell us of kind of what's coming down the road? Are there -- is there anything you could just share with us?

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yeah. I appreciate that question. As you've heard, we have an -- we have declining numbers slightly but going down number of babies born, and we have a huge increase in referrals to Birth-to-Three. I would say that's a very particular problem, but we had nine listening centers -- listening sessions across the state over the past seven months to hear from providers of home visiting, Birth-to-Three, Early Childhood what's happening out there, and I would say I don't like to raise alarm bells, but I am shocked at the number of programs in districts that are struggling with dysregulated children birth-to-five. Schools are forming special preschool classrooms, closing regular preschool classrooms because they don't know what to do with kids who are dysregulated, so there are mental health challenges with children birth-to-five that have spiked in the past five years. It's -- it's fairly new, and Commissioner Dorantes and I have increased the funding for social and emotional supports for childcare programs, the Early Childhood Consultation Project. We're contracted together. We're both seeing this. Commissioner Gifford and I have spoken about it. You know, we've increased our funding to the Connecticut Association for Infant Mental Health. I want you to think about that for a

## PUBLIC HEARING

minute. There is an association for infant mental health right now, and I think some of it is, you know, parents have irregular work schedules with the just-in-time scheduling. They don't know if they're going to work tomorrow, now they're working tomorrow, so the baby ends up somewhere else. You know the baby brain -- baby's brains need structure and routine, and a lot of the current economy is not allowing that for families. There is also -- we don't know the impact of the screens where kids aren't learning to regulate if they are acting up in the restaurant, they're getting an iPad, and that calms them down, and then instead of taking them from the table and walking with them and kids learning to settle down with an adult, and then they get to school, and there's no iPad when they act up, and so in our agency we're very concerned about this, and I'm happy to share the listening session results with this committee, but I'm looking at when I talked about the quality dollars, I'm gonna have to assign more of those for the Early Childhood Consultation Project. We're going to continue to work with DCF in our home visiting program, but we don't have the capacity to deal with this right now and give our programs the supports they need 'cause Representative Candelaria and others have already pointed out the challenges that early childhood programs are facing, and now give this to a community-based provider who already is struggling to be staffed as they can be.

I talked to a superintendent in the Hartford region who doesn't even have a para in their kindergarten class, and they have kids coming in who are so dysregulated because of some of the funding inequity, so I -- I don't want to alarm the committee, but I do want to say it's coming our way,

## PUBLIC HEARING

and I -- I see a lot of nods, which means you all are hearing this perhaps in your district, but just, know that Commissioner Dorantes, Gifford, and I have been talking about it and thinking about how can we leverage our resources to support communities, and home visiting is a really critical component because it gets to families earliest, and Commissioner Gifford has had some excellent suggestions for how -- without even going for some plan amendment we can work with communities to build their capacity and then that's billable to Medicaid, so we're think -- that's where my brain is with -- when what's coming down the pipe.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Mm-hm.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Well, it's not coming down the pipe completely.

REP. WALKER (93RD): No. It's right here. It's already here, and I -- and I appreciate that. I would appreciate that information being shared --

COMMISSIONER BYE: Sure.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Through the workgroup so that all of us can get the information, and I also want to thank -- commend you on the handout. I mean if anybody has a chance to read your -- your -- your information packet on Office of Early Childhood, it -- it's a wealth of knowledge and data that we need to crosscheck in a lot of things, so thank you so much for that.

COMMISSIONER BYE: I want to say that's many hours from Julie Bisi in my office and many others.  
[Crosstalk].

REP. WALKER (93RD): When you -- when you -- when you gave your staff praise for all the hours, I then

## PUBLIC HEARING

looked and saw that and I saw all the hours, so thank you. Representative McCarty.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be very brief. I just really would be remiss if I did not point out all of the tremendous work that your office has done on the Birth-to-Three program in identifying gaps that may exist between the program and entering kindergarten. I want to thank you for really taking the lead and identifying. I think early intervention is -- is key to providing quality of life and services, and later is more cost-effective, so you need to be congratulated. You're very modest in pointing out all the great work that was done there, and I'm looking forward to us all receiving that report.

COMMISSIONER BYE: It's sitting in my inbox. I said, Maggie, where's the report? She said, we're waiting for you to review it, so. [Laughing].

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): [Laughing].

COMMISSIONER BYE: It's ready once I read it, and then you will get it. Hopefully, maybe we'll even have it by the work -- next work session.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: That one's on me.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much. That was not my question though, but thank you. [Laughter]. I -- I did just want to ask you -- so thank you for all the work with the Care for Kids for program too and the chart that you gave us today showing the processing time. It looks like it was cut way down since January of 2019 to December, but there is still some delays in waiting and maybe if you could just give us a little more information on how we

## PUBLIC HEARING

could perhaps be helpful or what your recommendations might be, how we don't overlook anyone that's eligible and find out how we can improve, perhaps, the processing even more.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. The page that I think you're referring to others should have it with their testimony. We have been able to improve processing times, particularly when we have a full application, and Harriet Feldlaufer has been leading this work in our office, and it has been a bear because we have more and more coming in, and so more come in and so they're -- it's never going to be fast enough unless we can turn it around in two weeks for families, but we continue to look for ways to speed up processing. One thing that we're working on now -- again, using some of our federal dollars is a parent portal because a lot of this it's bad enough that you're waiting, but you have no idea. Programs don't know and parents don't know where it is in the process or if it's stuck, and so we're working with Deloitte to develop a parent portal where parents can upload information, where they can use it on their phone. Right now, they still handwrite an application, and then a worker types that in. It's 20/20, so we're over the next six months going to be launching a parent portal to speed it further. I'm going to see the Family Childcare provider Saturday in Meriden, and a year ago, I went and it was 119 days, and that was perhaps one of the most difficult meetings I had ever attended in my life. We are definitely seeing improvements. We are hearing about the improvements. We're down to 32 days, but really we should be able to turn these around in a couple of weeks. There -- there are a lot of rules that we have to follow, and in speeding, you don't want to get your error rate up, you know, so what we're

## PUBLIC HEARING

trying to do is make the checks without making mistakes and go faster, but this has been a problem, and again, childcare providers are underpaid as it is. Then to make them wait two to three months to get paid it's just not okay, so we continue to work on it, but I'm -- I'm really proud of the work our staff has done to improve this situation.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you very much.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. I'm just gonna -- Representative Rosario has to go to another meeting, so I'm going to let him jump in, and then go. Representative Rosario.

REP. ROSARIO (128TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Commissioner, good to see you up there. Thank you for all that you do. I want to speak about the Birth-to-Three program. Actually, my wife and I utilized that program with our son, Chris Junior, and the Birth-to-Three program was really instrumental in helping getting him going early on his school career, and one of the things I do want to mention is the diversity of these providers. We -- we were teen parents, so we didn't know what we were doing to be honest with you, and we were blessed to have providers that were you know they were Puerto Rican, they knew our culture. They knew what we were going through.

So, one of the questions that I do want to ask is you know what's the diversity like of these new providers that have been chosen? And, I'm actually about to say that my son is a senior in high school and National Honor Society, and he gets all the smarts from his mom. [Chuckling].

COMMISSIONER BYE: Birth-to-Three and his mom and dad. We contract with providers. I -- I don't

## PUBLIC HEARING

believe we score on diversity. Do we? No, but it is something we should ask about, asking them about the diversity of their workforce for the next RFP. I think that's something to keep in mind. We've certainly we have just added that we will reimburse for translation services on the first visit, which wasn't something that was available previously, so that's been a little bit of change to make sure that we're communicating with parents in a way that makes sense, and programs were doing it, but we weren't reimbursing, so -- so that's not okay, but it's -- you know, we -- we can certainly do better. I'm quite sure.

Just one other thing we are doing is working with Commissioner Cardona. We are looking at what's required to be certified and trying to expand what's acceptable looking at skills versus three numbers or letters after a name, and we believe that that will expand the workforce, so I think there's a proposal before the legislature to try to expand that right now, so that's been a change because we heard from providers who got to let more people do this work, so we hope that helps as well.

REP. ROSARIO (128TH): Well, thank you for -- for bringing that up because one of the things myself growing up and one of the things that we practiced, my wife and I, we were always -- we spoke Spanish at home. We spoke English outside of the home, so I think it's important there may be some families that follow that -- that pattern where they may speak their native language of Portuguese or whatever it is at home and English outside of the home.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yep. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Senator Abrams.

## PUBLIC HEARING

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH): Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Hello, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Hello.

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH): Lovely to see you as always.

COMMISSIONER BYE: You too.

SENATOR DAUGHERTY ABRAMS (13TH): I just wanted to say two things. One, is that I was at a meeting this morning with the Middlesex Coalition for Children, so I had the opportunity to hear a lot about a lot of these issues, and so I can imagine what you heard going around the state, and I applaud you for doing that because it is important that we hear from the people who are actually doing the work, and I also had the honor of sitting on the ICC, and I'm a huge supporter as I always have been with my special education background to the Birth-to-Three program, and anything we can do to support that I think is not only in the best interest of our children but also for those people who are more fiscally minded, it will save us money in the long run. It wouldn't be my first reason for doing it, but it's a good reason.

I wanted to point out something that someone said to me, which I'm sure that you, based on your comments previously, will understand about the -- the -- I am struggling to see how it was phrased. The rate adjustment delay. Not getting that rate adjustment to the school readiness and the child daycare programs, and the people at the meeting this morning did speak about their concern about the mental health issues that they're seeing in very young children, and one of the workers pointed out that when you can't keep staff, when you have that

## PUBLIC HEARING

revolving door, what that does to a child's mental health development, and so you can't ignore the fact that these things are connected. If we don't pay people and these people -- it's my understanding -- received their last increase in 2015, which was a modest increase at that, and so we've waited all this time to give them an increase they deserve and probably deserve way more money than we even were planning on giving them \$100 dollars a child I believe it came out to be. That we can't ignore the fact that we're seeing these challenging in the mental health struggles of our babies with the fact that we're not giving them consistent care by people they can count on because those people either can't keep those jobs because they don't pay well or the facilities can't continue to employ people because they don't have the money. So, there is to me a direct connection, and I just wanted to point that out. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yeah. Thank you for that.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Porter.

REP. PORTER (94TH): Thank you, Madam Chair, and the first thing I want to do is say thank you for the outstanding job and you and your team are doing. I know that teamwork makes the dream works. I want to sing your accolades, but I also want to make sure to applaud your support system because we don't get this done on our own. I want to go back to something you talked about. Well, first I also want to piggyback off of the great program of Birth-to-Three. A have a godson who is now a sophomore in high school that went to Lulac, and I can remember my first time walking in there how impressed I was with everything they did with these children, and

## PUBLIC HEARING

how they really prepared them for pre-K, you know three, four, five, and on, so I'm in full support of that \$3 million dollars.

You talked about deregulated kids, which really sparked my interest. I mean I get it. I know about it, but I want to know when you're looking at solutions to that are you looking at parent involvement programs, or I mean how are you looking to address those issues because back to the cuts. You know, we're cutting things that could actually help you and your efforts to make sure that that is not the case, but I think a lot of it should be rooted and grounded in parent involvement, especially from what you just described about how you know you get the kids to calm down at dinner by handing them a laptop, and then he gets to school and there's no laptop, so I think there's things that parents need to understand.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. I'm glad you asked that. One thing that we're working on is at the office is what we're calling a public health campaign about child development. It's being developed with people from Yale, from UCONN, and experts in child development and informed by parents as well to get information more readily available in the communities about what's typical child development, how do you support your child. There's some great work going on locally like Bridgeport is a real model with Bridgeport Prospers. They are -- they're really working to get child development information out there. I think that community-based solutions are important as well, but if I can take you up to a very high level, I think the work on the Governor's Workforce Council is actually ties to this because at the Workforce Council when they put out what are the things that are getting in the way of having a

## PUBLIC HEARING

great workforce, social-emotional skills and executive function comes into the four top challenges, you know, as much as having the right degree is having employees who are regulated. Any of you who have been a boss know that that's really important, and I chair the other services of committee, and we're really looking at how to make childcare accessible and talking about what's the role of employers in things like in just-in-time scheduling, and do employers understand the impact on children's mental health of parents not having regular work times and work schedules, and so I do believe that access to high-quality childcare in Connecticut is critical for kids mental health status, that parents have access -- I know as a toddler teacher I was a parent counselor as much as I was a toddler teacher.

Parents -- look. None of us know what we're doing [Laughing], but these supports are built into community-based organizations. People in our neighborhood when we talk about places like All Our Kin. Do you know how many parents All Our Kin is supporting in Connecticut -- that kind of family-based childcare? And, so I thin the same things that are going to support a high-quality workforce, which is that they have the infrastructure they need to get to work are the same things that are going to support young children, and also having regular work schedule, being able to make it to work on time. All those things support family economic security, and the two-generation work here going on in Connecticut and the work you're doing on benefit cliffs, Representative Porter, has just taken off because we're recognizing that there's an infrastructure that the family7 needs, and you can't pull that infrastructure away because they get a \$10

## PUBLIC HEARING

dollar raise a week and they lose \$2000 dollars in childcare. I think we need to make things more predictable for families in Connecticut, particularly at the low end, but I will say the dysregulation is not all about that. I mean because we see it in suburban and upper-income communities as well, and so that was our idea was this public health campaign, which we'll share. We have some information to share about it if you'd like, but using social media, Facebook, figuring out where parents are, and again, luckily, we have the preschool development grant, which is about systems building, so we're using the federal dollars to develop a system in a way for parents to get more information about basic child development and how to help your child calm down without the computer.

REP. PORTER (94TH): Right. Thank you so much for that, and I mean this is what gives me such great comfort in knowing that the Office of Early Childhood is in your hands, and I sincerely mean that. your expertise and background goes a long way. Experience, to me, is much more important than anything else, and not to say we don't need book smarts, but the last thing I'll say around the dysregulation -- dysregulated kids is I want to just suggest that you also look at the impact of trauma -  
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COMMISSIONER BYE: Absolutely.

REP. PORTER (94TH): And, how that manifests itself in children, and I'm not just talking about trauma once they get here. I'm talking about trauma before they get here as a mom who is a DV survivor and had a premature child as a result of physical abuse, so I want you to be mindful of that and see how that ties in as well.

## PUBLIC HEARING

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. We have a large number of children in Connecticut who have witnessed violence in their home. I think it's 8 percent. I bring that to you. I should just bring the -- we did a webinar to the field and talked about some of the data --

REP. PORTER (94TH): All right.

COMMISSIONER BYE: So, we'll bring you some of that, but --

REP. PORTER (94TH): Okay.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Trauma -- I should have said those words, but that -- that's obviously part of as well. It's not just the day-to-day. It's what kids are seeing.

REP. PORTER (94TH): Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Thank you.

REP. PORTER (94TH): Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Felipe.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to first off thank you and your staff. I think that we look down at these -- at these dollars appropriated, and you know, they don't work by themselves. You guys have to go out and really make every dollar worth it, and I commend you on the job you do for that. My question is piggybacking off of the question that Representative Rosario had about Birth-to-Three and the diversity, but my side of it is really thinking about what scores you may have for diversity in experience meaning urban providers for urban children, suburban providers for suburban children, and making sure that people have the

## PUBLIC HEARING

foundational knowledge of the home experiences that these children have.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Yes. I think that's a really important consideration, and I -- I know we do -- we work really hard with our contractors. Like, we reward contracts. That's why the contract process is so important and Representative Rosario raised that. We can certainly do better, and will be focused on that, and so I appreciate your input.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Nice to meet you.

REP. FELIPE (130TH): Nice to meet you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Representative Abercrombie.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): Thank you, Madam Chair. [Laughing]. Good afternoon, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Good afternoon.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): So, first of all, I have to say thank you on behalf of my colleague, Representative Currey, who had to leave. He just wants you to know how much he appreciates your support around the two-gen, and what a leader you've been as the commissioner around that issue. You know it's been something that's been near and dear to our hearts since you were here, so I'll just have to start with that, and then on my -- on my side, you know, I just really want to take this opportunity to say thank you. You know, as a commissioner, you have really tried to bring other commissioners into work collaboratives -- collaboratively --

COMMISSIONER BYE: You got it.

## PUBLIC HEARING

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): Thank you. It's that peanut butter again in the morning -- and so -- but we're seeing the results of that, right. You know, just -- just what you talked about about the mental health with the early intervention, and that's what we need, and that's what you're doing and I'm personally am just so appreciative of that, and then the fact that you go around the state and you meet with providers, and you do these you know townhall meetings, and then on a personal note, you came to my town and had a meeting with my Y who's been having some challenges with the childcare and the licensing and all that, so and even with a limited staff -- a limited staff, you've still been able to make some changes that are gonna really impact the children that we really try to protect in this day, so I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Thank you.

REP. ABERCROMBIE (83RD): For all your hard work and really your dedication to the young children in our community, so thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Thank you, Representative.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and again, thank you for all you've done. I -- I also want to thank you for cutting down the processing time because that was huge for me, especially when we made that big shift last year where all the people were -- were on the waiting list for too long. We want everybody to have access to early childhood education, but we also want them to be able to work, and work with a peaceful mind that their child is in a good environment, so thank you for that, and I think that one of the most important things that we can do is make sure that we create a stable funding source for

## PUBLIC HEARING

-- for a population that we are focusing on because by creating insecurity in funding, that creates the ability to never achieve any goals that we want. We've got to stop doing that, and we've got to make it more secure so that we can make the change around the corner, so thank you so much for what you do and have a great day. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BYE: Thank you everybody. Great to see everyone.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. So, that concludes today the morning session. We will reconvene at I think it's two o'clock. Nope, nope, nope, nope. Two o'clock. We will reconvene at two o'clock for the Secretary of State, for contract standards, and then at four o'clock, we begin our public hearing, so I look forward to seeing everybody back at that time. Thank you.