



## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 3, 2021

Good Morning, Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, Ranking Members, and members of the Education Committee. My Name is Erika Wiecenski, First Selectwoman of Willington.

I am testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities – CCM. As you know, CCM is Connecticut’s statewide association of towns and cities.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of:

**SB 976 - An Act Concerning Special Education**

**SB 977 - An Act Concerning Virtual Learning**

First, **CCM supports SB 977** which would address issues associated with virtual learning in Connecticut schools. The pandemic has impacted our lives in a variety of ways. Our students and teachers throughout the State have likely been most impacted. They were forced to go from traditional classroom instruction to a virtual online environment with limited guidance and support. SB 977 will enhance uniformity and provide direction for schools to effectively and adequately implement virtual learning.

CCM would recommend that any standards developed include local educational officials to ensure the practical application of such standards can be properly implemented in our educational system. As well, a uniform standard should be a guide rather than a prescribed method that includes a series of requirements as each municipality and school district have their own set of needs and abilities.

**CCM also supports SB 976** as it would address topics associated with special education. Special-education costs statewide exceed \$1.8 million – and continue to rise. Towns and cities pay for about 60% of those costs. Unforeseen demands for special education services too often result in local budget adjustments, supplementary appropriations, and other extraordinary measures. This is particularly troublesome in smaller towns, such as Willington, where the addition of even one special-needs student can decimate a budget.

CCM has included in written testimony particular topics that the task force should consider. I would also like to advocate for modifications that can be implemented now in order to provide municipalities stability and predictability in budgeting for special education. These recommendations include:

- Requiring that special education funding follow the student until such fiscal year concludes when the student changes school districts during a school year,
- Allowing a town to reduce their MBR in an amount that reflects costs associated with special education students once those students leave the district, and
- Decrease the Excess Cost grant threshold to at most 2.5 times the district's average per-pupil expenditure and fully fund the grant.

We encourage the Committee to review these specific proposals and consider them for legislative action during the 2021 legislative session.

**CCM urges the Committee to favorably report SB 976 & 977.**