



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**  
February 17, 2022

Amy Dowell,  
State Director, Education Reform Now CT

**Re: HB 5037: An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023**

Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, Ranking Members Miner and France, and members of the Appropriations Committee—thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding **HB 5037**. My name is Amy Dowell, and I am the State Director of Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT).

This is a year in which schools are attempting to recover from an unprecedented pandemic, and in which students must overcome learning loss and emotional hurdles. But it's also a time in which Connecticut is benefiting from large federal investments in COVID relief, and in which the state is projecting a surplus of over \$1.48 billion. Given that context of great need and great resources, the Governor's proposed budget falls short on meeting its responsibility to Connecticut's students.

As a matter of fundamental fairness and educational equity—every child who attends a public school in the state should be funded based upon their individual learning needs, regardless of which town they live in. Accordingly, we urge this body to pass a student-centered funding system. This year, the state's budget should prioritize reducing the inequitable and unfair disparities in educational resources that currently exist between districts along racial and economic lines.

Likewise, we urge this body to pass a budget that gives all Connecticut families an equal right to choose where best to enroll their own child in school. Affluent families in our state can already exercise school choice. But an equitable public education system would provide options to all families, so that they can also select the schools that meet their individual needs. This year, it's also time to fully phase-in need-based weights for schools of choice.

We further hope that this legislature will invest this year in facilities for public charter schools. No public school in Connecticut should have to make impossible choices between HVAC systems

during a pandemic and programmatic costs. Like any public school, public charters require appropriate funding to keep their classrooms safe and healthy for their students.

Lastly, we urge this body to listen to local families on the ground when they go above-and-beyond to demonstrate a need for their children. When a community is so committed to building more public school options for its students that it works through the charter authorization process with the State Board of Education—the legislature ought to put the funding in place to meet those needs. Such is the case in Danbury, where a charter was authorized to open in 2018, and has yet to be funded by the State.

All students are our shared future. Their needs are our shared responsibility. Please pass a budget that demonstrates our collective commitment to all Connecticut public school students.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the state, and for your work towards an education system that meets all students' needs.



#### **About Education Reform Now CT**

The state chapter of a national organization and affiliate of DFER CT, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.