

Testimony
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ECS Task Force
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Good evening and thank you for providing this opportunity.

Sharon Palmer
PRESIDENT

You are faced with an enormous, knotty task. There have been years of work trying to get education funding formulas right and while we have made progress, much remains to be done. The decision to take two years to complete your work is correct. However, you have set yourselves up for great expectations. We wish you success and offer a willingness to help in any way we can.

Melodie Peters
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Leo Canty
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Charles Morrell
SECRETARY-TREASURER

First and foremost. . .money matters. There may be efficiencies, programmatic changes, regional consolidations and other methods to stretch the education dollar but the truth is the State of Connecticut has never fulfilled its funding promises. Those who say we can simply reshuffle the deck of money cards are unequivocally wrong. It's time for that to change. Educational outcomes in Connecticut are determined primarily by the color of money and where you live. We should be able to end that in our wealthy State.

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We hope you begin by considering all the factors which must be balanced:

- Local control
- Urban vs. suburban and rural
- Rich towns vs. poor towns
- Weathering good and bad economic times



- Legislative, political, and fiscal dynamics and consequences
- Public opinion
- Autonomy vs. equalization
- Local vs. state vs. federal funding efforts
- Local property taxes

CCM, Voices for Children and CCJEF have provided you with historical information and comprehensive analyses of Connecticut's current system. We concur with most of that work. We need to emphasize that we do not support the Rhode Island model or "Money Follows the Child" initiatives. We encourage the task force to look at other models.

Here is a brief summary of the work we believe needs to be done:

- Find a way to fulfill the funding commitment the State of Connecticut made over 40 years ago.
- Make the solution as permanent as possible
- Raise the foundation and index changes to an appropriate measure
- Simplify the formulas
- Review the distribution formulas
 - Use free and reduced lunch for counting
 - Do not count college students or prisoners, however, balance with PILOT property tax exemptions.
- Check the accuracy of definitions
- Re-examine current methodology
- Find a way to more adequately fund/smooth special education costs.
- Examine MBR but continue to provide a safeguard for education funding.
- Include provisions for our state-wide magnet schools: the vocational-technical high schools and agricultural schools.

We have included testimony from 1990 given by George C. Springer, our former President. It reminds us that the more things change, the more they stay the same. I'll read just a small section to illustrate.

To conclude, we wish you all the best in this endeavor. You have a great opportunity but also great responsibility. I hope no one will be reading this testimony 20 years from now as an example of how little has changed.

Thank you for taking on this work.



CSFT AFT/AFL-CIO

George C. Springer
President

Leo Canty
Executive Vice President

Sharon Palmer
First Vice President

Testimony for the Education Committee
March 5, 1990
George C. Springer

Senator Sullivan, Representative Cohen, and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is George C. Springer and I am President of the Connecticut State Federation of Teachers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am here to speak in opposition to HB5150 - An Act Concerning Education Enhancement and Minimum Aid to Towns. Our union would like to see the "Education Cost Sharing Formula" left alone.

This is particularly difficult testimony for me today. On one hand, I've testified before most of you before on state aid to education. I have served with a number of you on the Education Equity Committee and I know you are quite aware of the intricacies and purpose of the education cost sharing formula and the probable impact of its modification. On the other hand, I am keenly aware of the anxieties in school districts where we represent teachers, the results of last year's formula changes, and the preparations being made even now to deal with retrenchment in a time of financial constraints. I've been around long enough to think "deja vu," but somehow the present stakes seem higher.

Let me first acknowledge that our union believes that both the economic and political constraints are real. That was evident in the Deputy Commissioner's testimony. We also realize

that there is great competition for limited dollars and other needs to be addressed. There is a great need for tax reform in Connecticut so that we can have a tax structure that is fairer and produces adequate revenues on a consistent basis.

Today I want to go back at least 10 years and then invite you to look ahead. For at least 10 years I have been testifying before the State Legislature on education funding. I served on committees in 1978, 1985, and 1988 that developed formulas that changed state funding in education. The first GTB formula moved us from a flat grant of \$250 per pupil to an equalization grant that considered wealth, effort, and need. This was necessary because wealth varied greatly from one town to the next and reliance on property taxes meant that some towns with little effort could provide great education support, while others with great effort could provide only modest support. Since this meant that the depth and breadth of educational programs available to students were directly related to where they lived, the Supreme Court in Horton vs Meskill said our flat grant system of funding education was unconstitutional.

There were those of us on the committee who signed on a minority report that said that the GTB program would not yield enough money and that the phase-in period would be too long to provide us with sufficient equity. Nevertheless, that program was modified each year and the phase-in time was extended. In 1985, it was clear that there was little real change in the disparities. To be fair, there were changes on the federal, state, and local level affecting this outcome, but there is no escaping the fact that the responsibility for achieving equity

across Connecticut falls squarely on the shoulders of the state. Consequently, the amount of state aid and its distribution have a tremendous impact on the ability of the poorest towns and those with the neediest children to provide educational equity and excellence.

The primary reason for the Education Enhancement Act was the concern over the persistent disparities and how they were reflected both in numbers of professional staff per thousand students and teacher salaries. The committee wanted the poorest towns and those with the neediest students to be able to attract and maintain the best and brightest teachers without being disadvantaged by salaries. There was also concern about projected shortages in teachers in certain areas as highlighted in a 1983 report of a Distinguished Citizens Task Force. When that Act passed in 1986 with overwhelming support from legislators of both parties, the major concern among local officials was what would happen to funding after the three years of funding provided for by the Act.

So in 1985, the Equity Committee developed an Education Cost Sharing formula to be considered by the State Board of Education and the legislature that would combine the funding of the GTB and Education Enhancement Act. Again we looked at disparities and created a different formula that would move us toward that time when we feel we had achieved equity. Again I signed on to a minority report that concluded that we had set our sights too low. That formula was modified in 1989, the first year in which it was implemented. The Governor proposes modifying it again this year. We ask you to resist that.

The argument is being advanced that the funding proposed is higher for every school district this year than it was last year. That misses the point. The proposed funding slows us up in our goal of achieving equity. For those students in those towns that are already far behind, in this state of extraordinary wealth, we will be denying them access to opportunities available in wealthier districts. We will force their districts to make difficult decisions about staff and programs, at the very time when we need every child in every classroom to be successful.

Our local governments, that have borne the lion's share of education funding, are groaning under the weight of cries for tax relief and improved service. The federal government, which has steadily retreated from its proper responsibility to fund education, views itself as a bully pulpit demanding great expectations and effort. A recent study documented that of the 16 leading industrialized nations, the U.S. ranked 15th in its support for K-12 education.

And so, we look to you. This state is in a better position to achieve excellence and equity than almost any other. The State of Connecticut's share of education funding and the way it is distributed does more to achieve equity than contributions from any other single source. Birthrates are highest among our poorest citizens and their educational needs are the greatest. Because our future workforce will be smaller and have a larger percentage of workers coming from poorer school districts, we must make sure these communities are able to provide the best education possible. The short-term effect of reducing education aid will be reducing education opportunities for the neediest

students. The long-term effect is placing our future at risk. The CSFT asks you to reject HB5051. As difficult a decision as it is, it may be one of the best ways this session has to support the development of all our children and insure our future.

On another matter, we support Raised Bill 5770 - An Act Concerning Human Growth and Development. We support its stated purpose and its provisions for parents to secure exemption to their child's participation in such a program.

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