



*Mobilizing for Children*

Testimony  
Education Cost Sharing Task Force Public Hearing  
July 12, 2012

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Good evening, my name is Jane Norgren and I am Chair of the Board of Directors of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC). For 26 years BCAC has advocated for the needs of Bridgeport children, and I'm here tonight to do exactly that – to help ensure that Bridgeport gets the money it needs to educate its students.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment before the ECS Task Force. We thank the Governor for increasing ECS funding for Bridgeport this year. The additional \$4.4 million is greatly needed.

The formula, however, is broken.

We urge comprehensive reform of the ECS formula and that state education funding be based on the actual costs of educating students, including consideration of student need. A new adequacy study should be done to determine what it costs to provide a quality education, including all support and wraparound services, especially for students living in poorer districts. We also urge that the ECS formula include funding for quality early childhood programs. The data is clear – participation in quality early care has a positive impact on student outcomes.

There is no disputing that the achievement gap in this state is huge. Students from districts like Bridgeport are at a significant disadvantage when compared to their peers living right next door in affluent Fairfield County towns.

The current ECS formula creates significant inequities; it ignores our state's constitutional obligation to provide an equal educational opportunity to all children in this state regardless of where they live; and it ignores the budget crises facing many school districts across the state.

A dollar spent in an urban, poor school district must stretch further than that same dollar spent in a more affluent district, because it costs twice as much to educate a student in a poor school district than in a wealthy one. In addition to instruction, urban school districts provide social work, guidance and psychology to students who need these supports, as well as remedial education, tutoring, early childhood opportunities, and other interventions.

But I'm also here tonight to report that, as a Bridgeport homeowner and taxpayer, I cannot stretch my dollars any further. My home is assessed at \$450,000 (perhaps a lot for Bridgeport but not so much for our region) and I pay more than \$20,000 a year in property taxes. We citizens can pay no more to help our educational system.

A politically expedient, across the board ECS increase only exacerbates the inequities in state funding. Connecticut must target increased state funding to school districts like Bridgeport that are struggling to educate the most challenging students. Reforming the ECS formula so that funding better reflects the true costs of educating students, particularly those in poor districts, is one of the best ways to close the achievement gap, bring Connecticut into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and ensure our continued growth and economic vitality as a state.

Thank you.