



TESTIMONY
of the
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
to the
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 15, 2010

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 93% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony to you on issues of concern to towns and cities.

CCM opposes Raised House Bill 5493 "An Act Concerning Strategic Planning in State Education Policy and Charter School Funding".

Among other things, this bill would take needed education funding from local and regional boards of education by reallocating funding to state charter schools in amounts multiplied by the number of students attending from local districts.

There is a false assumption that the absence of one student from a school results in a reduction in costs for that school district equal to that student's per pupil expenditure. This is not at all accurate - school buildings still must be operated and maintained; school buses must still run their routes; the same classes must still be offered for the remaining students; and the overall administration of the district continues to carry the same burden.

In good fiscal times such a proposal would damage public schools. In today's fiscal environment it would be devastating. It is important to remember that "state charter schools" are created and implemented through a process that local school districts do not govern. Allowing these entities to be created and then reducing education funding to towns and cities to pay for them is creating yet another unfunded state mandate on local governments. Please remember that the Education Cost Sharing grant has been "flat funded" for the current and next fiscal years and the formula has never been fully implemented. The State's share of K-12 public education costs is at 36.8%, the lowest in over a quarter-century. Even worse, in FY 2012 federal stabilization money will be gone and the State will find itself \$271 million below even that level. There has never been a single year increase of \$271 million in ECS funding, which would be necessary in FY 11-12 just to keep funding at FY 08-09 levels.

Towns and cities have also recently suffered a \$100 million cut in state aid in this biennium; the State is currently grappling with a \$500-\$700 million current year deficit; and, in excess of a \$3 billion deficit faces us in the out years. Other areas of State education funding in Connecticut are also falling well behind the need:

- **Special Education Excess Cost grants were cut this year by \$13 million.** Some of it was made up by federal ARRA IDEA grants, but that money did not necessarily go to the same municipalities that lost under the cut, because the federal program does not track the State's.
- **Special Education Excess Cost is funded at \$120 million** – but applications for reimbursements will be about \$145 million - with municipalities eating the \$25 million difference.
- The **Governor proposes to reduce funding** for public and non-public school transportation by a combined \$5.2 million, and magnet schools by \$1.5 million.

The State Board of Education was considering a similar “money follows the child” proposal this last December, but instead created an Ad Hoc Committee to study education funding models for choice programs and report back by December 2010. As there are so many factors to consider with respect to funding education – both state programs and local programs – it is important that a deliberative process is undertaken to ensure that one side of the education equation is not hurt for the benefit of the other and that the end result enhances education as a whole.

CCM urges the committee to take no action on this proposal and allow the State Board of Education's Ad Hoc Committee to complete its task before even considering an option with such potentially devastating effects on local public education.

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If you have any questions, please contact Kachina Walsh-Weaver, Senior Legislative Associate of CCM via email kweaver@ccm-ct.org or via phone (203) 498-3026.