

Rep. Lemar, Roland; Senator Looney; Rep.
Walker, Toni; Sen. Winfield, Gary; Grace

Subject: Public Education Budget Hearing

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative DiMassa, Representative Horn, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Jennifer Melo and I am writing to express why I believe New Haven's budget should be expanded. Governor Lamont's budget recommendation is inadequate as it suggests a below-inflation funding increase of only 1.5 % for New Haven. The budget must be raised both so that it accounts for inflation and so that it may provide the resources that kids, educators, and the public system need in order to serve all children well. Current education funding fails to calculate actual costs given rates and concentration of poverty, concentration of English learners, rates of incidence of special education, and other factors. The cost study completed by The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding in 2005 and updated in 2014 shows that our public schools are under-funded (in 2014 dollars) by at least \$1.2 billion. The Connecticut Supreme Court's 2018 CCJEF vs. Rell decision called for "an honest formula that delivers state aid according to local need," while yielding to the legislature's decision-making authority to determine sufficiency. An increase of just 1.5 percent, not even keeping up with inflation, essentially sentences New Haven to continued deficit and inability to meet students' holistic needs. We turn to the legislature to right this wrong and approve a budget that reflects our needs and values.

I am from Stratford, CT and I am extensively familiar with the deficit issues that Connecticut is facing. I personally experienced what it is like to attend a public school that is underfunded and I witnessed how this made our educational system incompetent in comparison to other schools in Connecticut. In my district, funding was going to be cut, teachers were going to be laid off, and elective courses were going to be canceled. It may not be obvious, but this is a vicious cycle that you are directly endorsing. In laying off teachers, we lose educators that teach unique classes and/ or college preparatory courses (such as AP or UCONN ECE courses). This puts our students at a complete disadvantage for pursuing higher education. At the rate that it was, students needed to spend out of pocket money on remedial courses before they attended college just so they could be on the same page students who are coming from other districts in Connecticut. Imagine what the outcome would be if Stratford were to lay off the teachers that are helping students get on track for college. Furthermore, these college-level courses are the challenges that advanced students need to take so that they may remain challenged and can grow intellectually-- which is the point of an education. I am currently a student at Yale University and I can testify that where I come from-- where I received my 12 initial years of education-- has affected me. The resources, opportunities, and level of education that were offered to me were inadequate in preparing me for the challenges that students face in higher education (by this I mean higher education broadly, not particularly at Yale). Given this, how could we say our educational system is successful when our students are neither thriving in k-12 education nor thriving in their pursuits of higher education. This is an extremely problematic issue that affects not only my home town but several communities within Connecticut--including New Haven.

In a research paper completed in 2016, "[School Finance Reform and the Distribution of Student Achievement](#)," authors Julien Lafortune, Jesse Rothstein, and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach conclude in their findings that, "After school desegregation, school finance reform is perhaps the most important education policy change in the United States in the last half century. We find that state-level school finance reforms enacted during the adequacy era markedly increased the progressivity of school spending. They did not accomplish this by "leveling down" school funding, but rather by increasing spending across the board, with larger increases in

low-income districts. Using nationally representative data on student achievement, we find that this spending was productive: Reforms also led to increases in the absolute and relative achievement of students in low-income districts. Our estimates thus complement those of Jackson et al. (2016), who examine the long-run impacts of earlier school finance reforms and find substantial positive impacts on a variety of long-run outcomes" Rothstein et al. (2016). You may reference the [paper](#) to see the specifics over what was discovered and how funding affects student outcomes. Clearly if you look at what is found, the finances of the educational system has a great influence over the success rate of students. Continuing to underfund schools is therefore directly affecting the effectiveness of the education that students are provided. Please, I urge you to consider re-evaluating the suggested budget, starting with small changes would help bring us closer to meeting the urgent needs of children, families, and educators in our classrooms, and creating the future that we all want for our state.

Thank you for your time, I hope you can take these thoughts into consideration for the benefit of our community.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Melo