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Senator Looney; Rep. Paolillo, Alphonse; Rep. [redacted], Rep. Walker, Tom, Sen. Winfield, Gary; Grace Whittington

Subject: Public Education Budget Hearing

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

We write on behalf of the New Haven Public School Advocates, a grassroots network of families, educators, and community members working to improve our public schools. We are gravely concerned with the proposed budget for public education, given that it perpetuates the continued underfunding of public education and its profound impacts on our state's social, cultural, and economic future. At 1.5%, the proposed increase does not even cover the rate of inflation.

I am so proud to be a result of the public school system in this country. While I did not attend high school in Connecticut, I attended high school in a county in Georgia that faces many similar issues. Without the state's support for public education, I would not have had access to the quality instruction and extracurricular activities that defined my high school experience. Public education should always be the top priority for the budget and students should reap the benefits of tax-payer dollars!

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.

The legislature can also consider the following recommendations:

- Permit Alliance funds to be used for a broader subset of educational programs, since Alliance isn't really "extra" when ECS is fundamentally inadequate.
- Fund charter school special education programs directly, thus removing this under-funded mandate imposed on school districts.
- Revert to a higher threshold for excess cost reimbursement. Lowering the threshold has decreased reimbursement, while already-high costs continue to rise.
- Eliminate free busing for private and charter schools.
- Provide expanded funding for extended school hours programming, early childhood, vocational and technical programs, mental/behavioral health, nursing, Family Resource Centers, and training in anti-racism/anti-bias + non-punishment-based disciplinary practices.

We know that funds are made available for the things that we collectively value. These 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 the opportunity to submit written testimony. You may reach us at nhpsadvocates@gmail.com with questions.

Writing on behalf of the network:

Leslie Blatteau

Teacher, Metropolitan Business Academy, New Haven Public Schools
New Haven resident

Eric Maroney

Former Teacher, New Haven Public Schools
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Sincerely,

Grace Whittington