



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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TESTIMONY REGARDING HB-6439: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE
BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING
APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Appropriations Committee

March 9, 2021

Presented By: Kathleen Callahan, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France, Vice Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, and all other distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kathleen Callahan, a resident of Stratford, and the Community Programming and Development Lead at the Connecticut Women's Consortium in Hamden. I am also the chair of the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter's Education and Legislative Action Network (NASW/CT ELAN). I am testifying on behalf of the chapter which represents over 2,300 members. We call upon the Appropriations Committee to oppose the proposed education budget in *HB-1019, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor* and consider our support for *SB-948: An Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut* currently in the Education Committee.

The legislative agenda of NASW/CT emphasizes advancing racial, economic, and social justice by promoting anti-racist policies and culturally responsive practices in all aspects of community life, including education. Additionally, NASW/CT supports legislation that specifically promotes elimination of inequities and disparities related to race, class, and ethnicity. Our concern is the potential exacerbation of these inequities and disparities.

According to a September 2020 report from the School and State Finance Project¹, Connecticut's public school districts are highly segregated with inadequate funding gaps that favor districts with predominantly white student populations. The state has a \$639 million funding gap between majority student of color and diverse population districts and districts with majority white populations.

¹ School and State Finance Project. (2020). *Fact Sheet: Racial Disparities in Connecticut Education Funding*. New Haven, CT: Author. Retrieved from <http://ctschoollfinance.org/resources/uploads/files/Racial-Disparities-and-Educational-Funding-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

A two year pause on ECS funding will hurt our highest-need, lowest-wealth districts, a previous mistake with outcomes we wish to avoid repeating. The past year has presented a stark reminder of both the resilience of our students and the state's obligation to provide equal education opportunities for all Connecticut public school children. While perhaps seemingly impossible in these days of financial uncertainty, this is the exact time for bold action that aligns with the values behind that obligation.

Using federal relief money is not the answer and this supplemental funding should be applied as defined: singular, temporary aid, specific to pandemic support. Students will need social and emotional support, as well as educational options to catch up on lost learning; teachers and staff will need preparation and training to continue a trauma-informed re-entry – the appropriate use of these funds. Addressing systemic racial inequity and restoring a strong foundation for all our public schools cannot be built on one-time federal funding.

Our students are going to be recovering from an extraordinary, challenging year. It would be an abdication of our responsibilities – as the adults supporting our students, our children – to make this process even harder for our high-need students and districts. Our students deserve to be fully funded now and NASW/CT asks that you consider *SB-948*, currently before the Education Committee. This bill advances a student-centered funding system to address the systemic racial disparities in funding and thereby, equitable and appropriate learning opportunities. Public magnet and charter schools are respectively 74% and 93% students of color² and as these schools are not funded from a needs-based formula as are other public schools, the learning needs of these students are not being met. Adjustments to the formula also address districts with concentrated poverty and high populations of students with limited English proficiency.

Education plays a pivotal role in an individual's economic and social mobility. Equitable funding is essential for access to resources and improved outcomes. *SB-948* would help realize the intent of equalization aid in education, leading to a more just and student-centered system which provides learning opportunities for all Connecticut public school students.

In closing, NASW-CT urges the committee to reject the governor's proposed education budget and consider input from *SB-948: An Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut* as you craft a revision.

² School and State Finance Project. (2020). *A Student-Centered Funding System*. Retrieved from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/resources/uploads/files/Student-Centered-Funding-One-Pager.pdf>.