

**Testimony in Opposition to
H.B. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium
Ending June 30, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor**

Mayor David Cassetti
City of Ansonia

Chairwomen Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to H.B. 6439 and Governor Lamont's proposal to pause the phase-in of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula. My name is David Cassetti and I have had the honor and privilege of serving as mayor for the great city of Ansonia for the past eight years.

As a mayor, I understand budgets are about priorities, difficult decisions, and balance. Unfortunately, the governor is balancing his budget at the expense of Connecticut's students and highest-need communities by pausing the phase-in of the ECS formula.

Pausing the ECS formula would not only cancel \$103 million in Alliance District ECS increases over the biennium – including nearly \$1.5 million for Ansonia — it would exacerbate the inequities and disparities that have been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an Alliance District where 68 percent of students are economically disadvantaged, our community and our students desperately need the increased funding the ECS formula phase-in would provide. We simply cannot afford to be flat funded, particularly during a pandemic.

Although the governor's budget would provide federal relief dollars for public education, these one-time dollars are not a substitute for ECS funding nor are they general operating funds. Those dollars were approved by Congress for preventing, preparing for, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has saddled our school district with extraordinary, unanticipated costs.

The federal dollars provided to the state should not be used as an excuse to flat fund our local public schools. Instead, these federal dollars should be used to address student learning loss, ensure equitable learning opportunities for all communities, and provide students with the social-emotional supports they need.

Additionally, the governor's proposed budget would delay full education funding for Ansonia's students even longer by changing the fully-funded date of the ECS formula from fiscal year 2028 to FY 2030. Nine more years is simply far too long for our students and community to wait to receive full education funding.

Our community and our district have significant needs and we need proper state funding in order to provide our students with the educational opportunities they deserve while balancing our town budget and keeping Ansonia affordable for our diverse community.

Our community and our students need proper education funding from the state and that is why I ask the Committee to not only reject the governor's proposal to pause the ECS phase-in, but to

support a fully-funded, equitable, and student-centered funding system like S.B. 948 would create.

S.B. 948, which is currently before the Education Committee, would fully fund all districts, increase and expand the formula's English Learner and concentrated poverty weights, and mitigate enrollment volatility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I ask that you consider these important and necessary changes as you craft your budget.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. 6439 and the importance of fully and equitably funding public education. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

David Cassetti
Mayor, City of Ansonia