

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Kate Conetta and I'm from Danbury, CT. I am writing to you today to express my opposition to H.B. 6439 and its pause of the ECS formula.

Over the last 12 months, the pandemic has exacerbated the already difficult situation we've faced in Danbury. As an Alliance district, the state had already identified the additional need in Danbury, and our struggles have only become more pronounced since the onset of COVID-19.

Though I submit this testimony as a private citizen, I am also a member of the Board of Education here in Danbury, which has positioned me to receive many communications from parents and guardians who are coping with substantial challenges, and expressing tremendous concern about their student's education and well-being. Among the most substantial obstacles: our lack of physical space kept us from returning to school in-person for much longer than our neighboring communities; even now we are only able to safely accommodate hybrid mode.

I know that equitably funding our districts is critical to the success of our students and communities, now more than ever.

Certainly our higher rate of EL students (25% of the district) and special education students (approaching 1 in every 8) has created huge demands on our system, but additionally, Danbury remains one of a very few districts in CT which has continued to grow in size.

Yet the money which was promised by the state through the ECS formula remains a slow trickle, which means we are not properly equipped to meet the needs we have, let alone the ones which are coming because of the pandemic.

Pausing the ECS phase-in for two years will do a tremendous disservice to our students, particularly those who have additional learning needs. While districts that have a small population of high-need students might be able to survive the phase-in pause, districts with a large population of students with greater learning needs will suffer.

As an Alliance district, we are already among the lowest-performing school districts. This proposed budget will result in an over \$7.5 million loss in funding. This seems counterintuitive to me. We should be prioritizing our neediest districts, not delaying funding.

The suggestion that federal money from the CARES Act and ESSER Funds should be supplanting the operating costs which would normally be covered by ECS funds is also not feasible. Using one time funds this way would create a huge financial cliff for local budgets, with devastating long-term impacts for Alliance districts in particular.

I am urging you to reject the governor's proposed budget as it stands and consider the needs of our students as you craft a revised budget. It is past time we put them at the forefront of the conversation.

Thank you for your time.

Kind Regards,

Kate Conetta
Danbury, CT