

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

Dr. Joseph DiBacco
Superintendent, Ansonia Public Schools

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 Joseph DiBacco and I have had the honor and privilege of serving as superintendent for Ansonia Public Schools since July 2019.

Over the past year, students, teachers, and parents across Connecticut have faced unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has not only upended public education, it has revealed and shone an incredibly bright light on the inequities that currently exist in Connecticut's public education system.

The governor's budget proposal would only exacerbate these inequities.

Simply put, pausing the ECS formula's phase-in favors less-needy districts at the cost of investing in Connecticut's highest-need, lowest wealth school districts. By pausing the phase-in of the ECS formula, the governor is canceling \$103 million in Alliance District ECS increases over the biennium – including nearly \$1.5 million for Ansonia.

While the governor's budget would provide federal relief dollars to districts, these one-time dollars are not a substitute for state education aid 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 left districts like Ansonia with extraordinary, unanticipated costs.

We know students across our district and across Connecticut have suffered learning loss as a result of the pandemic. The federal dollars provided to the state should be used to address that learning loss, ensure equitable learning opportunities for all communities, and provide social-emotional support for students. Federal dollars should not be used as an excuse to flat fund our local public schools.

Additionally, the governor's proposed budget would delay full funding for our students even longer. Currently, the ECS formula is not scheduled to be fully phased in until 2028. The governor's budget would delay that by two years to 2030.

Ansonia is an Alliance District as well as a Priority School District. Sixty-eight percent of our students are economically disadvantaged. And according to the state's most recent Distressed Municipalities list, Ansonia is the most fiscally and economically distressed municipality in Connecticut.

Nine more years is far too long for our students to wait to receive the education funding they need and deserve. Our elementary school students should not have to wait until they're about to graduate high school to receive a properly funded education.

Our community and our district have significant needs and we need proper state funding in order to provide our more than 2,200 students with the resources and educational opportunities they deserve.

This 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.

Currently before the Education Committee, S.B. 948 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Joseph DiBacco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Joseph DiBacco
Superintendent, Ansonia Public Schools