



CONNECTICUT

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director

Education Reform Now Connecticut

March 9, 2021

Re: H.B. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor

Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Dathan, Hartley, and Nolan, Ranking Members France and Miner, and Members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **in opposition to H.B. No. 6439**.

I am Amy Dowell, State Director for Education Reform Now CT, the state chapter of a national advocacy organization that works towards educational equity. After careful analysis, the recommendations in this budget, as they pertain to addressing the needs of vulnerable students in Connecticut, are simply a workaround to avoid the state's full funding obligation to them.

In 2017, the Connecticut General Assembly passed, with bipartisan support, a new Education Cost Sharing funding formula that prioritized both fairness and transparency. Over the last two years, districts have been able to count on substantial increases in funding year-over-year that their schools have long needed. COVID-19 was not a predictable challenge when this formula was drafted four years ago. However, like all states, Connecticut has been offered a lifeline by way of federal relief funding to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Those federal emergency resources were clearly designated to supplement, and not supplant, district budgets. The Lamont Administration's budget proposal does the opposite.

Instead of speeding as much relief as possible to districts that have been working hard to stay safe and open for students, this proposal takes our state on a path that will lead to many facing an uncertain cliff when COVID relief funds dry up, and that shortchanges what they are entitled to this year.

The formula redesign in 2017 was grounded in the understanding that many districts in our state needed more funding, while several districts were collecting scarce resources that should have gone to communities serving students with the greatest need. It set the table for many of the important and urgent proposals presented this legislative session to improve upon this work presented this legislative session. This work is well underway. We hope the result of these efforts will be speeding up the phase-in of dollars, increasing priority to districts that are

struggling with poverty, including all public magnet and charter schools, and finally but critically, focusing on addressing racial inequity in resource allocation.

And what does appropriate funding look like in a school district? Every district in a wealthy and well-educated state like Connecticut should have the resources to provide reading specialists and robust English Language Learner supports. Every district should have a school social worker and a full library. Every district should offer music and afterschool enrichment. Every district should have soap in its bathrooms, working windows, and ventilation systems. And every district should be able to offer competitive salaries for teacher aides and special education interventionists.

That is not the ceiling, but the floor.

So what would holding back the dollars that were meant for schools to reach that floor do for Connecticut? They will end up costing our state and our students steeply in the end.



About Education Reform Now CT

The state chapter of a national organization, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.