

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Tanis and I'm from Bridgeport, 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, we have watched our educators, parents, and students navigate distance and hybrid learning during the global COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen the struggles they face, struggles that have only exacerbated the inequities within Connecticut's public school system. We know how difficult it has been for districts that do not have adequate resources to educate their students amid a pandemic, and we know that equitably funding our districts is critical to the success of our students and communities, now more than ever.

When the pandemic shut down Connecticut one year ago, I was teaching high school physics, serving students from Bridgeport and New Haven. I was lucky to be a part of a school that had the infrastructure to respond quickly and have kids learning within 3 weeks of shut down. When I noticed students weren't attending class, I reached out to every parent and worked with our school team to figure out why. Majority were having issues with the internet capability and devices enabling virtual learning. Furthermore, my freshman students did not have experience with learning on a device or blended learning instruction, so transitioning them to online format took time away from content and skill acquisition, feedback, and practice. Our school mobilized quickly to deliver hot spots and Chromebooks immediately when we knew there was an issue. While I am grateful a student could join two to three weeks later, they missed over a month of instruction compared to their peers in the same school. Zooming out, students in wealthier districts with devices and the internet were able to start live instruction with their teacher mere days after school buildings closed. Compared to their peers within NHPS and BPS, they had an advantage of getting multiple more weeks of synchronous instruction with their teacher for spring 2020. These are just the barriers that needed to be circumvented to even have a chance at accessing their education with the appropriate tools. As education continues to be impacted this year, the underlying disparities in quality of education have been further deepened.

Pausing the ECS phase-in for two years will do a great 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.

It's no secret that Connecticut's public schools are deeply racially and economically segregated. There is a \$639 million funding gap between Connecticut districts that serve student populations that are majority white versus those that serve a majority BIPOC population. The impact of this gap has only become more apparent over the last year and we cannot keep perpetuating this gap by postponing ECS funding. We owe it to all of our students, but especially our students of color, to do everything in our power to close this funding gap as soon as possible. We know that the quality of public schools across Connecticut are not equal. People buy their homes according to public schools, if and when they have the privileges of multiple options for housing and the opportunity for home ownership. We must deliver on the promise of an "equal opportunity and excellence in education for all Connecticut students" as the State Department of Education's website professes, which is deeply impacted by funding.

I understand these extraordinary times have impacted our state's budget, but our students have been demonstrating such resilience and dedication in these same extraordinary times. The federal money from the Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund should be used to provide more social-emotional supports and resources to our students — not used in place of properly funding the ECS formula.

It's our responsibility to ensure our children are continuously being educated and funded equitably and based on their needs. It is unconscionable for us to even consider pausing funding based on student need, especially when S.B. 948, currently before the Education Committee, prioritizes fully and equitably funding districts based on the needs of our students, has the potential to close Connecticut's racial funding gap by 68%, and will make a real, tangible, and an immediate difference for our students.

Our students cannot keep waiting for the funding they need to learn. Turning a 10-year phase-in plan into a 12-year phase-in plan guarantees that a second-grade student will not experience a fully-funded education until they are a year shy of graduating high school. This is frankly unacceptable. The financial stability of a state should *never* come at the expense of our children's education.

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.

Sincerely,
Tanis Klingler