

Dear Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Dathan, Hartley and Nolan, Ranking Members Miner and France, and esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I write to you to today in response to the Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies, which I believe raises some serious issues for Norwalk and for education in our great state of Connecticut. I understand the difficulties faced by all levels of government as we approach budgeting in such an historically difficult time. However, I cannot support a freeze of the Education Cost Sharing formula rollout as agreed to in 2017.

By freezing the ECS grant at FY 2020-21 levels, Norwalk Public Schools will not receive the increases promised in the 2017 statute whereby the formula was redesigned. Therefore, we will not receive \$419,624 in FY 2021-22, and \$908,600 in FY 2022-23, for a total loss of \$1,328,224 in state funding through the biannual budget. For FY 2021-22, the Norwalk Board of Education has already approved a budget that allocates this funding to much needed math specialists and attendance monitors who will be key to addressing learning loss caused by the pandemic, but should be part of our long-term work to close the achievement gap in our city. The state must keep its word to continue to phase in the ECS formula, as it is more crucial than ever that we equitably resource our schools. Following the CCJEF case, it was understood that we needed to address the unjust and regressive funding systems in our state. A freeze only defers that goal, which is unacceptable. The ten-year phase-in was already too long to wait to ensure quality education to our children regardless of zip code. The Governor's proposal suggests stretching this phase in to 12 years – which means a child would be able to go through their entire school career without ever benefiting from the full funding they should be entitled to.

The Governor suggests that funding for education from the federal government can be used to supplant this ECS funding, allocating \$4,620,608 for FY2021-22 and FY2022-23. Unfortunately, the guidelines put out by the Connecticut State Department of Education regarding the use of ESSER II funds is not supportive of using those funds to cover existing budgetary items. In comparison, in FY 2020-21 we received a total of \$10 million to address the issues caused by Covid and the needs of conducting summer school and reopening schools during a pandemic. As the Governor is in discussions with the federal government regarding any new municipal or education funding, it would be helpful if federal funding came with fewer constraints in terms of uses and deadlines for its use if municipalities are intended to use it to cover existing budgetary costs during the economic downturn.

Freezing the Excess Cost Grant is also problematic, as there is no freeze on the costs associated with servicing our most vulnerable students. Norwalk is proud of the fact that we have created robust special education programs, but some students do need a higher level of care and those costs are challenging for school districts. Thank you for your consideration of support for Norwalk to join the Open Choice program. This is an opportunity for our students. However, Norwalk deserves to have excellent schools within our district, and these funding sources are essential to our ability to provide that. Our children should not have to travel outside of their community to access an excellent education.

Thank you for your consideration and your hard work on behalf of the people of Connecticut.

Barbara Meyer-Mitchell

10 Allen Road