

Good evening,

My name is Anamilena Moreno and from Norwalk, CT, and am the Community Engagement Coordinator for Norwalk ACTS. I thank you all for your time.

I am here to oppose the governor's proposal to freeze ECS funding in HB 6439.

I am humbled to have the opportunity to advocate for a state I call home. I graduated from Norwalk High School in 2010. Going through the Norwalk Public School system, I played sports and engaged in afterschool activities along with participating in community projects. With the support of my school system, I was able to make it through challenges and barriers I encountered, to stand here on behalf of my community and other children who are relying on their education and school's support, to simply survive. With that support, I completed my Bachelors Degree, and began working with children and families. In the Spring of 2020, I obtained my MSW specializing in Community Organizing from Sacred Heart University. I could not stand here today if it weren't for the education and support I had when I was a child and I cannot stress that enough.

I bring this personal experience up because it relates to what I learned first hand as an MSW intern. In 2018 I was placed in Norwalk's Public High Schools to work alongside the bi-lingual social workers, EL teachers and EL students. The demand for staff and student support was so high, I dove right in.

2018-2019 was the highest of a four year period that saw a huge influx of immigrant families coming to Norwalk, where the basic and educational needs of new students increased. There were days I would get to the schools only to find a line of the students waiting to talk to the social worker because they had an emergency. They ranged from social and emotional struggles, abuse, immigration, legal needs to students & their families facing eviction, or not having food on the table.

Educators who were dedicated to our students' academics, were also drowning with the lack of resources and support the school and students had. Teachers were trying to provide the students with an education but found themselves going above and beyond to provide support in other ways that the students deeply needed at the time, and still do.

I make it a point to highlight this one example of EL students in the year of 2019 because it's related to educational and basic needs that already existed for families in poverty and children of color, not just EL students, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pausing ECS funding will only continue to hurt our highest-need and lowest wealth districts. By removing funds for education, you are not only taking away from their education, but taking away support from the educators to do their jobs. These needs of our students are only increasing and becoming more diverse. The last time we paused the ECS formula, we created more funding disparities for Connecticut students. In a time where equity is finally in the forefront of education discussions, we would not want to increase that gap.

Norwalk ACTS supports students to lead their own monthly town halls. Our students expressed strong concerns over the lack of academic support and resources from their schools. I understand that there is incoming federal funding to help our students with COVID recovery; however, this federal funding should be used as supplemental money and not as a replacement for state funding. I urge you all to please reconsider freezing the ECS. Our children's education has already been affected this year and the additional funding could not be more needed at this time.

I thank you again for your time and consideration.

Anamilena Moreno
Norwalk, CT