

**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. Janet Robinson
Superintendent, Stratford 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 Janet Robinson and I have had the honor and privilege of serving as superintendent for Stratford Public Schools since July 2013.

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 shone an incredibly bright light on the inequities that exist in Connecticut's public education system.

Unfortunately, the governor's budget proposal would only exacerbate these inequities.

Pausing the ECS formula's phase-in would favor less-needy districts at the cost of investing in Connecticut's highest-need 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 over \$3 million for Stratford.

Although the governor's budget would provide federal relief dollars to districts, these one-time dollars are not intended to be 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 Stratford 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.

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.

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 in 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 nearly 6,700 students with the resources and educational opportunities they deserve.

This is why I ask Committee members 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 a fully and equitably funded ECS formula.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janet Robinson
Superintendent, Stratford Public Schools