



State of Connecticut
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COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Sen. Cathy Osten, Rep. Toni Walker, Sen. Joan Hartley, Reps. Lucy Dathan and Anthony Nolan, Sen. Craig Miner, Rep. Mike France, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for accepting my testimony concerning HB 6439, *AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.*

I would like to testify in strong opposition to the proposed "pause" to the state's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) increases. Over the course of my career in the Connecticut General Assembly, I have been a passionate advocate of increasing ECS funding and creating a structure where our school districts are funded fully and equitably, as quickly as possible. Despite positive steps in recent years to address education funding disparities, there are cities and towns, like those I represent and some of yours, that need, deserve, and are owed further investment.

The quality of our students' educational experience and opportunity should not hinge on their zip code. I represent Ansonia and Derby- the first and fifth most economically-distressed municipalities in the state, respectively. These districts should be fully funded—as should every underfunded district. We need to see a substantial and meaningful increase in their share of ECS funding in the biennium budget, not the proposed delay in increases.

It is no coincidence that our state's best funded schools are also the highest performing schools, and that our state's most underfunded schools consistently underperform and are the lowest ranked. There is strong academic evidence that the amount of money invested per pupil significantly impacts education outcomes and can widen or narrow disparities. From the course offerings, class size, and educational supports available to extracurriculars and facility amenities, there is stark contrast between our overfunded and underfunded schools.

In my district, Ansonia and Derby schools are truly blessed to have some of the highest-quality, skilled, and passionate educators, administrators, and support staff in the state. However, we are still Alliance districts, still face resource shortages, still face challenges in compensating our amazing educators competitively, and we could do so much more for our students and staff if we

were properly funded. The ECS increases must not pause, they must accelerate. This can be best accomplished by backing SB 948—a bill that I do hope members of this committee will support and fund, instead of the proposed pause within HB 6439. SB 948 accelerates the effort to fully fund our schools delivering millions, while HB 6439's "pause" would deprive our schools of millions in scheduled increases over the next two years.

In closing, here is a simple and indisputable truth: the children of my district are just as important as those in any of yours. Their lives, their futures are just as important. As public servants, servants to these children, we have a moral and ethical obligation to close the funding and opportunity gap as quickly as possible. I will say this as often as it needs to be said—to those willing to listen and louder for those who don't--until the state ensures that every child in this state receives the top notch, fully funded, equitable education they deserve. A sincere thank you to those on this committee who are fighting for substantive ECS increases and fighting for our children. Please remember the children of my district when considering HB 6439 and other ECS bills this term.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this most important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kara Rochelle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

State Representative Kara Rochelle
Proudly serving the 104th Assembly District