



NEW HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Chairpersons McCrory and Leeper, Ranking Members Berthel and Zupkus, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Jeffrey Sousa and I am the Superintendent of New Hartford Public Schools. I am testifying today in support of H.B. 5002 (An Act Concerning Funding, Special Education and Early Childhood Programs) and S.B. 7 (An Act Concerning Educational Equity). For the first time, the State of Connecticut has met its legal commitment to fully funding public education. This is commendable; however, it is momentum that our students and communities cannot afford to lose.

For more than 30 years, since the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula was created in 1988, our schools have not received the state's fair share of funding. This has had a compounding effect on the district's ability to get resources to students. Over the course of the most recent ECS phase-in, Connecticut's districts were underfunded by \$1.88 billion. Imagine what our schools would look like today if we had invested those funds over the last eight years. The increases to municipal taxes would be much lower.

S.B. 7 takes steps to invest much-needed resources into our public schools by increasing the ECS formula's foundation, which has remained at \$11,525 since 2013. Over the last 13 years, we have seen inflation increase by 40%, something that I and everyone in my life has experienced. Our districts are facing these increases too. Districts cannot continue to absorb rising costs without additional support. The State's contribution needs to reflect actual economic reality.

H.B. 5002 also makes meaningful progress toward equitably funding Connecticut's students, regardless of what type of public school they attend. However, the bill's proposed increase to the ECS foundation amount is still too low. I respectfully ask the Committee to increase it so districts can truly meet students' needs.

At a minimum, students need fully-staffed schools, including paraeducator support, counselors, and librarians, as well as breakfast, lunch, and transportation to be successful. These are not extras, they are the basics. Yet these are the budget lines where cuts are being made year after year. Our students deserve stable, fully funded schools. I respectfully ask that the Committee fight for the funding our schools need by voting yes on H.B. 5002 and S.B. 7, as well as strengthening these bills by increasing their proposed ECS foundation amounts.

Respectfully submitted,

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