



TESTIMONY CONCERNING

H.B. 5003: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION FUNDING IN CONNECTICUT

**February 3, 2023
Education Committee
Appropriations Committee**

Chairman Currey and Chairman McCrory, Chairwomen Osten and Chairwomen Walker, Representative McCarty, Representative Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and other members of the Education and Appropriations Committees,

The Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law, is the largest children's legal rights organization in New England. Our mission is to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of Connecticut's most vulnerable children and young adults who are dependent upon the judicial, child welfare, health, education, and juvenile justice systems. CCA provides holistic legal services to these young people through individual representation, systemic advocacy, education, and training.

CCA urges you pass into law H.B. 5003, An Act Concerning Education Funding in Connecticut, as this bill will eradicate the educational funding disparities that perpetuate the racial inequities in our state's education funding system.

Under Connecticut's current funding system, which relies primarily on property tax, there are vast differences in educational funding between Connecticut's cities and towns, almost wholly upon racial lines. The school districts responsible for educating the majority of the state's students of color or BIPOCⁱ students, also are the districts with state's highest need students. These high need students include those economically disadvantaged students eligible for *Free and Reduced Price Lunch*, English Language (EL) learners and special education students. Yet, under Connecticut's current funding system, **these school districts are substantially underfunded to meet those student needs.**

The school districts of Bridgeport, Hartford, Waterbury and New Haven all possess among the **greatest numbers of students in each of these high need categories.**ⁱⁱ These school districts are also more than 75% BIPOC students. Yet, they are substantially underfunded when

compared to districts with a majority of white students.ⁱⁱⁱ **The 2022 statewide gap** between districts that are primarily comprised of all white students and all other districts is **\$788 million dollars. This gap has *increased* from \$639 million in 2019.** For example, the school district of **Bridgeport spends \$4,182 less per student than a typical white majority district** in Connecticut.^{iv} As a means of comparison, we can compare Bridgeport Public Schools to Greenwich Public Schools. While Bridgeport has historically spent only \$16,439 per student, with only \$3,448 of that coming from local funding, Greenwich has spent \$24,309 per student with nearly \$23,166 of those funds coming from local funding alone.^v Nearly 90% of all students in Bridgeport are BIPOC whereas only 39.1% of the students are in Greenwich. H.B. 5003 will correct these inequities in access to funding by ensuring full funding of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant.

H.B. 5003 will also ensure that funding will be based on **individual student need**. Under the changes outlined in the bill, the additional funding for districts could be used towards special education costs and additional mental health services – meeting the needs of their students to provide them with a free and appropriate public education, *without* the burden of grappling with the current reality of how local property taxes determine how funding is allocated.

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequities in Connecticut’s public education system, and the \$1.5 billion in federal COVID relief aid has momentarily reduced the racial funding gap. These one-time funds have a fast-approaching expiration date, one that makes it difficult for school districts to use for sustainable resources to alleviate the economic and racial disparities that persist in our schools. **H.B. 5003 will bridge the gap of the current fiscal cliff that is looming when ARP/ESSER funding is projected to run out, and provide schools with the funding that a student requires for their individual learning needs, regardless of their zip code.** If H.B. 5003 is passed, school districts will be able to both mitigate the impact of time limited federal funding and prioritize student-centered funding that will support social, emotional, and mental health goals without delay.

The state’s largest BIPOC districts need to do better by their students. Increased funding means enhanced learning and better outcomes for these students. There is no question that educational funding is connected to better student outcomes. Increasing funding will lead to greater success and brighter futures for those students who are struggling in Connecticut’s underfunded districts. Such achievement and opportunity is something *all* students deserve, not just white students. Recent State Department of Education data underscores the poor performance of students in underfunded districts. For example, in its last Report Card published on EdSight (the State Department of Education public data portal), students in Bridgeport School District were nearly 17 percentage points behind the state average in math scores and more than 14 percentage points behind the state average in reading scores.^{vi} Increased funding would translate to more resources for Bridgeport’s students in an individualized way, helping to

improve and level student performance in the not so distant future. Bridgeport’s students, just like students from Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury, are entitled to the opportunity to excel and grow. **H.B. 5003 and the increased funding it will direct at these districts and Connecticut’s most vulnerable students in general is essential for creating more equitable education system for our state.**

Under current law, not only do students face substantial resource limitations due to where they live in Connecticut, but they also face further limitations depending on the type of public school they attend. **H.B. 5003 will expand ECS weighted funding to students attending public schools of choice and will eliminate general education tuition billing** for both magnet schools and Agriscience programs.^{vii} This student-centered funding approach will provide all students the opportunity to choose the public school of their choice that fits their individual needs, without the burden of wondering if their choice of school will limit their educational opportunities due to inequitable school funding.

In summary, our office urges the Committee to pass H.B. 5003 so that true educational equity can be experienced by all children, especially those in Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury and New Haven.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and time.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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ⁱ Acronym representing Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

ⁱⁱ School & State Finance Project, [Mismatch Between Funding & Student Needs \(ctschoolfinance.org\)](https://schoolstatefinance.org/issue/mismatch-between-funding-and-student-needs) A Policy Briefing, October 18, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ School & State Finance Project [Racial-Disparities-and-Educational-Funding-Fact-Sheet.pdf \(ctschoolfinance.org\)](https://schoolstatefinance.org/issue/racial-disparities-and-educational-funding), September 2020.

^{iv} School & State Finance Project. (2023). *Racial & Economic Disparities in Connecticut Education Funding* (Working Paper). Hamden, CT: Author.

^v Based on figures from the 2020-2021 school year. See: <https://schoolstatefinance.org/issue/spending>.

^{vi} Connecticut State Dept. of Education, Ed Sight, Bridgeport School District Report card, School year 2021-22 found here:

https://edsight.ct.gov/SASStoredProcess/guest?_program=/CTDOE/EdSight/Release/Reporting/Public/Reports/Storage/ConnecticutReportCard&_district=Bridgeport+School+District&_school=+&_select=Submit

^{vii} School & State Finance Project, Overview of H.B. 5003, <https://schoolstatefinance.org/resource-assets/Overview-of-HB-5003.pdf>.