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Testimony of

Ray Rossomando
Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee

**HB 7150 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING EDUCATION**

March 1, 2019

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando. I am a former teacher and currently serve as the Director of Policy, Research, and Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

CEA does not support aspects of HB 7150 addressing ECS.

CEA supports the continued phase-in of the ECS formula that was enacted in 2017. We do not support the expedited phase-in contained in HB 7150 that reduces funding to certain towns over a much shorter period of time. Public Act 17-2 (JSS) provided for a phase-in of a new formula that results in more funding to underfunded towns and corrects for funding to towns that would have received in excess of 100% of what the formula says they should receive. Although we advocated for such towns to not see a reduction, the phase-in established by PA 17-2 through 2027 softened the impact on school districts affected by this correction. HB 7150 expedites the phase-in, which could negatively impact many districts' ability to fund educational programs.

We also would like for the committee to closely review Section 21, which changes the poverty factor in the ECS formula from participation in the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch Program to also participating in government programs as defined in the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act (and SNAP and TANF) through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). An unintended consequence is that children of undocumented parents may be excluded as well as children in households that cycle on and off federal programs or children in families that are transient. We are also concerned that not all districts in Connecticut participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), potentially leaving many more children also uncouncted. Ultimately, changing the criteria to receive FRPL through the CEP could result in more children going hungry and our poorest school districts receiving less federal and state aid through ECS.

Additionally, we are unsure of the intent of lines 325-332 and 368-374. While they appear to ensure that state education dollars are allocated to local boards of education from the town, they also appear to require every town receiving increases in ECS dollars to submit to the state plans similar to those required of Alliance Districts. Requiring the development of additional plans not only appears to be an extra and unnecessary burden—by placing the burden on towns, the bill transfers to municipalities decision making authority on educational matters that should instead rest with boards of education. Moreover, statute already requires ECS funds to be “expended for educational purposes only” and further prohibits towns from supplanting local funding for schools (10-262i(c)). Therefore, we ask the committee to review this section for its intent and potential effect.

Lastly, CEA opposes proposed changes to the minimum budget requirement that would permit districts to reduce their school budgets by .5% simply for the purpose of planning for “consolidating schools or sharing services.” This potential reduction in funding for local schools would be in addition to any funds or resources diverted from the classroom for such planning. It is also important to note that CEA is strongly against shifting state teacher retirement obligations onto local school budgets; however, we do agree that excluding such payments from being counted as part of the MBR would be appropriate.

Thank you.