



Testimony of Kristen Record

Before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee.

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HB 6187 An Act Concerning the Restructuring of Certain Taxes and Equity
SB 821 An Act Concerning the Reformation of Certain Taxes and Tax Equity

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, Senator Martin, Representative Cheeseman, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Kristen Record. I am a resident of Bridgeport and I am speaking today as a member of the Recovery for All Coalition and the Connecticut Education Association. I have taught Physics at Bunnell High School in Stratford for the past 21 years. I am the Stratford Education Association Vice-President for Secondary Schools and I am the 2011 CT State Teacher of the Year.

I am testifying in strong support of HB 6187 and SB 821.

This year has been a painful struggle for so many of my students and their families. The COVID pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated the already existing economic disparities in our state, and this has affected not only my student's academic well-being, but also their emotional, physical, and financial well-beings.

Do you remember almost a year ago today, when schools across the state closed down? One of the first things we began to worry about was how we were going to feed students without the schools being open? What does it say about our state, one of the wealthiest states in the country, that we depend on schools to feed kids? 1 in 5 CT adults with children said their children don't have enough food to eat – those are the children where I live and where I teach. My students shouldn't have to worry about where their next meal will come from - they did before the pandemic, and they do now. But your actions on these 2 bills could create a better future for my students and their families.

Last March, when all non-essential businesses were closed and a stay-at-home order was initiated, do you know what many of my high school students did? They picked up extra hours at the grocery store or gas station. Why? Because their families needed help paying the bills. In

addition to food, my students were worried about getting kicked out of their apartments, worried about the electricity getting shut off, and how they were going to get internet access. When I started remote teaching to prepare my students for the Advanced Placement exams last May, I had students arranging their break times at work so they could call into my zoom class and some who asked if we could hold class sessions at night because they had to work during the day. The problems faced by my students' families didn't disappear this summer or fall, just because the state re-opened. In fact, in many ways the families of my students are more at risk now than they were before. This is why fair taxation initiatives such as creating a child tax credit to provide relief to working- and middle-class families with children, and lowering taxes on working class families by expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit are so important.

As an educator, I am also deeply concerned about how Governor Lamont's budget negatively impacts pre K-12 schools and higher education in the coming years. His budget freezes ECS funding levels. I remember back in 2017 when I testified before the State Board of Education about how the loss of nearly \$2.9 million in ECS funds devastated the Town of Stratford. At the time, Stratford ranked 112 out of 163 municipalities in terms of wealth, but we ranked 2nd in the amount of ECS money lost. We were still working to repair the damage of those cuts last year when the pandemic hit, so I find the idea of freezing ECS funds in the upcoming budget both appalling and destructive. Now is not the time to widen the opportunity gap that exists for so many students across the state. Rather than freezing funds, we need to fully implement the new ECS formula by investing \$350 million. This is foundational to racial and class equity and would also alleviate unequal property tax burdens on disadvantaged communities such as Stratford and Bridgeport.

I am equally concerned about my students' future ability to access higher education opportunities. Our community colleges, state university system, and UConn face unprecedented budget deficits due to the pandemic. Cutting programs or raising tuition costs to address these deficits will only further place higher education out of reach for many of my students. Now is the time to invest more, not less, into these systems.

It is a sad fact that Connecticut is one of the richest states in the nation, but leads in income and wealth inequality. As a public-school teacher, I see the toll that systemic racial inequality in income, housing, education, and health care has taken on so many families, while Connecticut's billionaires have added an additional \$3.6 billion to their wealth during the pandemic. It's simply not right. We have before us an opportunity to stop the hurt so many families are feeling by funding essential services, reducing economic and racial inequality, and setting our state on a path to economic recovery by restoring fairness to our tax code, and I urge the Committee to have the courage to make the right choice and pass HB 6187 and SB 821.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.