

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5002 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION FUNDING, SPECIAL EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.: 372

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill exists to improve equity and funding for general education, special education, and early childhood programs. This bill seeks to support our public school by minimizing district spending. By increasing the Education Cost Sharing foundation, restructuring funding for magnet schools and AgriScience programs, adjusting special education rate-setting tactics, and allowing districts to use special education grant funds from third-party providers, this bill will better support the public-schools of Connecticut. This bill provides practical and inclusive way to strengthen Connecticut's education system.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

[Click [here](#) and Enter Substitute Language]

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education

This testimony analyzes the fiscal and policy impacts of H.B. 5002, emphasizing several major funding changes. The commissioner explains that Section 1 would increase the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) foundation annually based on inflation or personal income growth, significantly raising state education spending (from about \$18.7 million in FY27 to over \$315 million by FY30). Section 2 would restructure funding for magnet schools and AgriScience programs by

phasing in full ECS-based, need-weighted funding by FY30, adding further state costs while also adjusting funding formulas and gradually reducing certain weighting factors.

The testimony also highlights Sections 3 through 6, which would eliminate tuition payments from districts and families for magnet and AgriScience programs by FY30. While this reduces financial burdens on local communities, it shifts those costs to the state, increasing overall state spending without necessarily increasing total education resources.

Additionally, the CSDE raises concerns about Section 9, arguing that limiting special education rate-setting to “related services” is too narrow and may not adequately address the full costs of out-of-district placements. Finally, there is support expressed for Section 10, which allows districts to use special education grant funds from third-party providers, giving districts more flexibility in meeting student needs. Overall, the testimony concludes that while the bill improves equity and funding predictability, it also significantly expands state financial responsibility and presents concerns about long-term costs and certain policy approaches.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kate Dias, President, Connecticut Education Association (CEA)

The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) expresses support for HB 5002’s efforts to increase the ECS foundation level so it reflects the actual cost of providing public education in 2026 dollars, and to tie future increases to inflation to ensure funding keeps pace with rising costs. However, they take a cautious stance on its proposed changes to the magnet school funding system. The author reserves judgment on how the changes may affect different types of magnet schools and sending districts. Importantly, the CEA strongly opposes any shift that would require local school districts to absorb tuition costs without corresponding state funding, warning that such a move would place additional financial pressure on local systems.

John Flanders, President, SEEK

The testimony provides a section-by-section analysis of HB 5002 with a focus on special education funding, rate-setting, and consistency across related legislation, offering both critiques and targeted support for specific provisions.

On Section 1, the author notes a potential conflict between HB 5002 and SB 7 regarding how the ECS foundation amount is adjusted for inflation or set prospectively. They express a preference for the approach in SB 7, suggesting it provides a clearer or more effective framework.

On Section 8, they strongly oppose changes adopted in Public Act 25-67, arguing that local education agencies should be responsible for paying the actual cost of meeting a student’s IEP in magnet schools. They state that the current language risks underfunding special education services and creating unnecessary conflict.

On Section 9, the testimony emphasizes the importance of including parents and providers as key stakeholders in the rate-setting process, specifically recommending that SEEK be formally consulted.

On Section 10, the author supports reversing a prior restriction that made district programs using contracted personnel ineligible for SEED grants. They argue that many districts rely on contracted specialists due to staffing shortages or limited caseloads and excluding them from SEED funding is impractical and counterproductive.

Kate Ericson, Executive Director, LEARN

The author of this testimony provides strong support for SB 7 and HB 5002 while emphasizing the urgent need for sustained and predictable funding for magnet schools and RESC programs. They begin by urging lawmakers to preserve the \$12 million investment in RESC magnet schools, arguing that it is essential after years of flat and frozen funding. The author describes both bills as a significant and long-overdue investment in Connecticut's public education system, particularly for magnet schools. A key focus of this testimony is the importance of increasing the ECS foundation amount and establishing annual inflation adjustments. The author supports provisions in HB 5002 related to special education (particularly the clarification allowing districts to use SEED funding to partner with RESCs and other providers). They frame this bill as a continuation of the original mission of RESCs: helping districts collaboratively address challenges they cannot solve alone.

William Rice, Assistant Executive Director, Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES)

ACES supports H.B. 5002 and S.B. 7 as major steps toward creating a modern, sustainable funding system for interdistrict magnet schools. The testimony highlights the importance of transitioning to a formula-based system with a path to full funding by 2030 and supports increasing the ECS foundation to strengthen overall education funding. The author states that maintaining the existing \$12 million in magnet funding is critical during the transition, warning that removing it would create financial instability. It also emphasizes that as tuition is phased out, state funding must fully replace it to avoid gaps. Additionally, the author supports maintaining student-need funding weights and calls for RESC representation in special education rate-setting decisions.

Vincent Candelora, House Minority Leader, House Republican Caucus

The House Republican Caucus offers a measured and conditional response to HB 5002, expressing support for increased education funding while raising concerns about its impact on municipalities and local taxpayers. They acknowledge that additional state funding for education can benefit schools by supporting teachers and providing resources for students. However, the caucus argues that under current law, increases in state ECS funding can unintentionally trigger higher required local spending due to minimum budget requirements (MBR). This creates a compounding financial burden on towns, which must raise additional revenue, often through property taxes, to stay compliant.

The testimony emphasizes the strain this places on local communities, warning that residents may face rising property taxes as municipalities struggle to keep pace with mandated increases in education spending. To address this, the caucus proposes a "hold harmless" approach, allowing towns to offset increased state aid by reducing their required local contributions accordingly. This, they argue, would ensure that additional state funding genuinely relieves financial pressure rather than exacerbating it.

Yvette Goorevitch, Executive Director, ConnCASE

ConnCASE supports Section 9 of HB 5002, which requires the Commissioner of Education to consult with key stakeholders (including ConnCASE, private special education providers, and other organizations) when developing rates for IEP-related services such as speech, behavioral, and occupational therapies. The author also urges that this process include broader rate-setting for special education services and transportation to ensure districts can budget effectively and maintain appropriate out-of-district placements. ConnCASE also supports Section 10, which removes a restriction that previously made district programs ineligible for SEED grants. They emphasize that this change is necessary due to ongoing shortages of

specialized providers and allows districts to continue delivering required services through contracted professionals.

Charles Dumais, Executive Director, Cooperative Educational Services (CES)

The author of this testimony strongly supports the core goals of HB 5002 and SB 7, framing both bills as important and overdue steps toward correcting long-standing flaws in Connecticut's education funding system. The author states that the current ECS foundation amount has not kept pace with the real cost of educating students, and that both bills attempt to address this through different (but complementary) approaches. HB 5002 ties funding to inflation and income, and SB 7 establishes stepped increases over time. They encourage lawmakers to draw from both proposals to strengthen the final legislation. A central concern in his testimony is the state's unmet funding commitment under a 2024 policy that capped tuition contributions from districts and required the state to cover the remaining share through grants. He argues that the proposed elimination of a \$12 million RESC magnet school grant would break this commitment and create an unfunded mandate. The author urges the Committee to (1) support the foundation increases in both bills, (2) preserve the \$12 million magnet school grant during the transition toward full implementation, and (3) ensure meaningful representation of rural districts and regional providers in ongoing funding discussions.

Christina Ghio, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) expresses support for Section 10 of HB 5002, which modifies requirements for special education and expansion development grants aimed at strengthening in-district special education services. The OCA argues that these grants are essential for helping school districts expand their capacity to serve students with disabilities within their local schools. They emphasize that many students require highly specialized supports that districts may not have in-house. Meeting these needs often requires flexible arrangements such as short-term contracts with outside experts or consultants. In some cases, hiring full-time staff is not practical, making contracted services a more efficient and effective solution.

Paul Cicarella, State Senator, 34th District

This testimony offers a clear and supportive argument for HB 5002, focusing specifically on the need to increase the ECS foundation amount as a core improvement to Connecticut's school funding system. Rising expenses in areas such as transportation, special education, staffing, technology, and utilities have outpaced state support, forcing municipalities to rely more heavily on local property taxes to fill the gap. This individual's testimony argues that raising the foundation amount is a "student-centered" solution because it strengthens the base of the funding formula, ensuring that all districts and all students benefit, rather than targeting only specific communities. This approach would bring greater stability and predictability to school funding while easing financial pressure on towns and taxpayers. This testimony combines a straightforward explanation of the issue with a broadly optimistic argument, framing the proposal as a practical and inclusive way to strengthen Connecticut's education system.

Jeff Gordon, State Senator, 35th District

The testimony expresses strong support for HB 5002 and broader efforts to improve funding for public education. The Senator emphasizes that special education expenses are one of the most significant financial pressures on local school budgets, often leading to increased burdens on property taxpayers during, what they describe as, an ongoing affordability crisis. The testimony highlights HB 5002 as a positive step because it improves structure, transparency,

and predictability in special education funding. Key provisions such as clearer rate-setting, defined cost standards, and requirements that additional special education aid be used directly for special education services, are praised for strengthening accountability and ensuring funds are used as intended. The author also stresses that special education is a mandated and essential service, and that more predictable state funding helps towns plan budgets more effectively while reducing pressure on local property taxes.

Desi Nesmith, Executive Director, CREC

CREC supports H.B. 5002 and S.B. 7, calling them a long-overdue “lifeline” for underfunded RESC magnet schools. This testimony emphasizes the need to maintain the existing \$12 million state commitment, warning that removing it would create unsustainable deficits since RESCs lack taxing authority. They also support combining elements of both bills to create a stable, predictable funding model. Additionally, the testimony supports provisions allowing greater flexibility in special education funding (SEED grants) and urges including RESC representation in special education rate-setting decisions.

Rene Boardman, Agriscience Teacher, Region 1 Schools

This individual’s testimony provides a clear and policy-focused testimony in strong support of HB 5002, emphasizing the need for fair and sustainable school funding. The author highlights two key provisions of the bill: adjusting the ECS foundation amount for inflation and continuing the phased increase in funding for agriscience programs. The testimony argues that without inflation adjustments, rising operational costs force schools to cut programs and/or place greater financial pressure on local communities. Indexing funding to inflation, the author explains, would create more predictable and realistic support for districts. A central concern in the testimony is the inequitable funding of agriscience programs, which currently receive only about 42% of their ECS-based allocation. The author states this as an issue of fairness and stresses that agriscience students are public school students who deserve equal investment. The author underscores the broad value of agriscience education, noting that it equips students with both technical and transferable skills that prepare them for a wide range of careers.

David Brown, Founding Principal, PROUD Academy

This individual’s testimony offers a detailed and policy-driven testimony in support of HB 5002 and SB 7. The author argues that public schools are facing increasingly complex student needs, (including higher numbers of multilingual learners, students requiring special education, and those from low-income backgrounds) while funding structures have not kept pace with inflation or rising operational costs. This creates instability for schools trying to maintain both academic quality and fiscal responsibility. The author highlights key provisions of HB 5002, including those in charter and choice programs. It emphasizes that students in charter schools are still public-school students and should be funded accordingly. The testimony connects these broader funding issues to the mission of PROUD Academy, a newly approved public charter school in the Naugatuck Valley designed to serve high-need students in a structured, supportive environment. Throughout the testimony, the author maintains a measured, professional, and solutions-oriented tone and frames the legislation not as preferential treatment for charter schools, but as a necessary step toward fairness, stability, and accountability.

Dale Clark, Career Coordinator, New London Public Schools

This testimony draws on extensive, firsthand experience in New London Public Schools to argue in support of HB 5002, emphasizing the connection between school funding, student

engagement, and long-term economic outcomes. The author explains that poverty is the root cause of many attendance issues. Challenges such as mental health struggles, homelessness, and the need for students to work all contribute to disengagement. The author argues that expanded investment in workforce development, vocational programming, and partnerships would help re-engage these students by providing tangible career pathways. The testimony highlights successful examples, such as partnerships with local industry (including Electric Boat), which have led to job placements for students and improved attendance and motivation. However, these opportunities remain limited and are at risk without increased funding. HB 5002 is framed as a way to expand access to these impactful programs by supporting transportation, after-school opportunities, and workforce credentialing.

Kathryn Dal Zin, Agricultural Science Teacher, Lyman Hall High School

This individual offers a personal and strongly supportive testimony for HB 5002, framing the bill as essential to sustaining and expanding access to AgriScience programs across Connecticut. They highlight two key provisions of the bill, indexing ECS funding to inflation and continuing the phase-in of full funding for AgriScience programs. Without these adjustments, the financial burden shifts to local districts, often resulting in program cuts or inequitable access. As a former student, they describe how participation in an AgriScience program provided hands-on learning and leadership opportunities that fostered both technical expertise and essential life skills. As a current educator, they emphasize the transformative impact these programs continue to have on students, while also pointing out ongoing inequities (particularly limited access due to funding constraints that leave many students on waiting lists). The author argues that the current funding structure creates systemic barriers that prevent students from pursuing their interests. Fully funding AgriScience programs would expand access, promote inclusivity, and provide meaningful pathways for student success.

Ida DeFrancesco, Farmer, Northford

This author of this testimony, a fourth-generation farming family from Northford, is in support for HB 5002 based on both personal experience and concerns about equity in access to Agriscience (ASTE) programs. The author discusses the success of their two sons as evidence of the program's value. They credit the Lyman Hall ASTE program with preparing both students through hands-on learning, leadership opportunities, and career-focused education that traditional high schools could not provide. The testimony argues that the current funding structure creates a significant barrier for out-of-district students. HB 5002 is presented as a solution that would phase in full state funding for out-of-district ASTE students, removing financial disincentives and expanding access to these programs. The testimony also emphasizes the broader workforce value of ASTE programs, in regard to their role in preparing students for both agricultural careers and higher education and supporting Connecticut's agricultural economy.

John Ely, Executive Director, Project Oceanology

This individual submits testimony in support of HB 5002, SB 7, SB 310, and HB 5329, using Project Oceanology as a long-standing example of successful regional educational collaboration that depends on stable funding. They explain that Project Oceanology (Connecticut's only remaining interdistrict cooperative of its kind) has operated for more than 50 years, providing marine science education and STEM programming to tens of thousands of students annually. Despite its wide reach and continued demand, the author notes that its state funding has significantly declined over time, shifting from multiple dedicated interdistrict grants to just one competitive grant and a small supplemental partnership. Ultimately, the author is

urging lawmakers to recognize interdistrict cooperatives as essential components of Connecticut's education system that require sustained baseline support to remain viable.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST

This testimony focuses on the financial strain rising education costs place on municipalities and property taxpayers, and it advocates for increased state support across several key education funding areas. The central argument is that education (particularly special education) now consumes a growing share of local budgets, and many towns are struggling to keep up due to inflation and rising costs. A major concern is the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) foundation amount, which has remained frozen at \$11,525 since 2013. The testimony also strongly opposes proposed changes that would eliminate \$12 million in funding for RESC-operated magnet schools. The testimony also supports increased funding for AgriScience programs, recognizing that their role in providing hands-on STEM education and preparing students for careers in field, is important.

Patrick Gibson, Deputy Executive Director, School & State Finance Project

This individual offers strong support for HB 5002 and SB 7, describing them as important steps toward addressing long-standing inequities in Connecticut's education funding system. The testimony argues that the current ECS foundation amount, frozen since 2013, no longer reflects rising expenses in staffing, transportation, healthcare, and special education. The author also recommends extending weighted funding to Open Choice students, who are currently excluded. In addition, the author suggests several technical improvements to strengthen transparency, accountability, and implementation, including clearer reporting on funding and adjustments to special education and AgriScience provisions.

Brian Greenleaf, Chief Financial Officer, EASTCONN

EASTCONN supports HB 5002 as important steps toward improving Connecticut's education funding system, particularly for magnet schools and school choice programs. They state that HB 5002 moves funding in the right direction by increasing the ECS foundation amount, reducing tuition burdens on sending districts, and indexing future growth to inflation or income. However, they warn that the bill still leaves a structural funding gap for regional magnet schools that cannot be solved through cost-cutting alone. They also recommend strengthening the funding model by adding additional weights for all interdistrict magnet students and extra support for arts-focused magnet programs, which face higher operational costs.

Gail Heath, Admin Assistant, CABA

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABA) strongly supports HB 5002 and SB 7 for increasing education funding and addressing long-standing inequities in the ECS formula. CABA emphasizes that inflation has reduced the real value of state funding by about 40%, while student needs (especially among multilingual learners and students with disabilities) have increased, leaving districts under financial strain. CABA also supports HB 5002 provisions allowing SEED funds for contracted special education services and phased-in funding for magnet and agriscience programs. They additionally support creating a funding working group, ideally coordinated with other state efforts.

Rebecca Martinez, State Representative, CT General Assembly

The testimony supports H.B. 5002, arguing that Connecticut's current education funding system has not kept pace with rising costs such as staffing, transportation, special education, and technology. This gap has placed increasing financial pressure on school districts and local

taxpayers. The bill is seen as an important step toward modernizing the Education Cost Sharing formula to better reflect real costs, improve predictability, and restore a more balanced partnership between the state and municipalities. The author emphasizes that stronger, more equitable state funding will help communities maintain educational quality, avoid cuts, and ensure long-term stability for both schools and taxpayers.

Maria Matos, Chief Advocacy Officer, Alliance of Charter Schools (ACCS)

This testimony supports S.B. 7 and H.B. 5002 as necessary steps to modernize and make education funding more equitable. The testimony emphasizes that all public schools (including charter, district, and magnet schools) serve diverse student populations and should receive fair, need-based funding. The bills are praised for increasing the ECS foundation amount, adjusting for inflation, and improving funding equity. The author also highlights that predictable and adequate funding is essential for stability and urges passage of both bills as a benefit to the entire public education system.

Steven Hernandez Esq., Executive Director, ConnCAN

The author of this testimony supports S.B. 7, H.B. 5002, and H.B. 5329 as important steps toward fixing Connecticut's outdated and inequitable education funding system. The author states that the ECS foundation has not kept pace with inflation, forcing municipalities to cover rising costs, and supports increasing and indexing it to reflect real expenses. They also strongly support eliminating tuition payments between districts for magnet schools, emphasizing that the state should fully fund these programs instead of shifting costs to high-need districts. Ensuring full, need-based funding for all public-school options (including charters and magnets) is framed as essential for equity and long-term stability. Overall, the testimony views these bills as complementary reforms that would improve funding fairness, stability, and innovation across Connecticut's public education system.

Karen Bergin, Vice President, New London Board of Finance

Supports this bill.

Stally Dastoli, Executive Director, Odyssey Community School

Supports this bill.

Victory DiNardo, Resident, Trumbull

Supports this bill.

Conor English, Resident, Trumbull

Supports this bill.

Andrew Feinstein, Legislative Chair, SEEK

Supports this bill.

Briley Frank, Student, Lyman Hall High School

Supports this bill.

Emily Gibbs, Student, Lyman Hall High School

Supports this bill.

Maddalena Deluca, Student, Lyman Hall High School

Supports this bill.

Susan Hambey, Board Member, New London Public Schools

Supports this bill.

Elizabeth Heagney, Resident Trumbull

Supports this bill.

Bridgette Hickey, Deputy Executive Director, LEARN

Supports this bill.

Lisa Kimyachi, Director of Student Services, Odyssey Community School

Supports this bill.

Steven Madancy, Superintendent of Schools, Southington Public Schools

Supports this bill.

Gabriella Mastropetre, Student, Lyman Hall High School

Supports this bill.

264 Residents expressed support for HB-5002.

73 Anonymous testimonies expressed support for HB-5002.

The following testimonies also expressed support:

Sheetal Abbi Ron Acosta, Hartford Public Schools Evelyn Ahuatl Crystal Aldophe

Maria Aljoburi Thomas Anderson, Superintendent, East Hartford Public Schools

Milly Arciniegas, Executive Director, Hartford Parent University

Danielle Avery, School Counselor & Parent, Trumbull Public Schools

Keith Avery, Parent & Teacher, Trumbull Jamie Barr Shelburn, Member, East Lyme BOE

Mark Benigni, Superintendent, Meriden Public Schools

Matthew Bennett, Elected Member, Woodstock Public Schools BOE

Kevin Bishop, Selectman, Town of Winchester Brittany Blair, Teacher, Windham Public Schools

Lois Boisvert, CFO, Newington Public Schools Geoffrey Bolte, Selectman, Winsted

Monica Brase, North Star Fellowship, The Mind Trusts Andrew Brien, Agriculture Teacher, Winsted

Thomas Broderick, Town Councilor & Educator, Trumbull
Genevieve Cabrera, Member, North Haven BOE
Mary Calorio, Regional Town Administrator, NECCOG Shari Cantor, Mayor, Town of West Hartford
Elise Capraro, Educator, Killingly Courtney Cardinal, ASTE Program Director, Killingly High School
Dr. Kara Casimiro, Superintendent, Danbury Public Schools
Deana Chrzan, Business Manager, Woodstock Chris Clouet, City Council New London, LEARN
Selina Conklin, Elementary Teacher & Resident, Trumbull
Matthew Coppler, Town Manager, Town of Enfield Erin Daly, Educator, Danbury
Carlos da la Barrera, Principal, Windham Middle School Gina Devlin, 6th Grade Teacher, Thompson
Joseph DiBacco, Superintendent, Ansonia Public Schools
Stefanie Donahue, Board President, Odyssey Community School Timothy Dutton, Teacher, Bridgeport
Justin Elicker, Mayor, City of New Haven Electra Ferriello, PTA, Daniels Farm School
Amanda Gabriele, Member, North Haven BOE Ashley Gaudiano, Council Chair, Town of Trumbull
Emma Gianoplus, Director of External Affairs, Libertas Academy Charter School
Lee Goldstein, Chair, Westport BOE Sonia Greene, Chairperson, Woodstock BOE
Stacy Guertin, Educator, Lisbon Michele Guglielmo Ashley Gulyas, Member, Norwalk BOE
Emily Hayden, Member, Woodstock BOE Karen Helene, School Director, Benhaven School
Jeffrey Helming, Educator, Newington Aracely Hidalgo, Make the Road CT
Amilcar Hernandez, Chief Financial Officer, New Haven Public Schools
Alyssa Himmel, PTA VP of Fundraising, Tashua School Luanelly Iglesias, Educator, Danbury
Tracy Jenkins, Educator, Danbury Dan Jerram, First Selectman, Town of New Hartford
Daniel Juarez, Member, New Haven BOE Jacqueline Knapp, Literacy Consultant, Taxpayer
Kelli Langer, Business Educator, Thompson Public Schools Susan Lannon, Chair, Killingly BOE
Maureen Lazarus, Educator, New London Kim Libertino, Parent & Educator, Trumbull
Fernando Lopez, Policy & Strategy Fellow, ConnCAN Marta Lopez, Make the Road
Heather Lorenz, Educator, Danbury Aurelia Luna, 8th Grade Student, Barrows STEM Academy
Joseph Macary Ed.D., Superintendent, Vernon Public Schools
Massimo Mallozzi, Member, Board of Finance Lauren Averitt Mancini, Teacher, Meriden
Daira Marin, Youth Power Strategist, Make the Road CT
Katie Maron, Chief of School Support, CT Charter Schools Association
Cassidy Martin, Board Chair, Scotland Elementary School
Kristina Martineau, Superintendent, Westbrook Public Schools

Chrisliany Martinez, 7th Grade Student, Windham Public Schools
Tracey McDougall, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau
Kelsey McGuire, Educator, South Windsor Lainie McHugh, Chair, Trumbull Board of Finance
John McNamara, Common Council Majority Leader, New Britain
Drew Micheal McWeeney, Asst. Professor, CT State College William Mecca, Educator, Trumbull
Lauren Meli, Social Worker, Trumbull Nina Merkin, Teacher & Resident, Trumbull
Steven Moccio, Superintendent, Enfield Public Schools Marinda Monfilston, Parent, Hartford
Patricia Moonan, Member, Shelton BOE
David Moran, Agriscience Teacher, Housatonic Valley Regional High School
Louise Morrison, Educator, Brooklyn Nayeli Nadal, Student, Windham
Madeline Negrón, Superintendent, New Haven Public Schools Kelly Newton, Teacher
Maureen Nicholson, First Selectman, Town of Pomfret
Patricia Nicolari, Executive Director, Proud Academy Mary Njeri, Paraprofessional, Trumbull BOE
Sheila Partlow, Parent, Putnam Public Schools
Daniel Pearson, Executive Director, Educators for Excellence Carla Pereira, Educator, Danbury
Robert Phillips, Executive Director, NHCOC Shaylene Portuguese, 11th Grade Student, Windham HS
Stacy Powell, Parent & Teacher, Trumbull Jill Powers, Board Chair, Stratford BOE
Jacqueline Prieto, ML Teacher Resident & Parent, Trumbull PS
Santiago Quiroz Torillo, 11th Grade Student, Windham High School
Dr. Laly Noya Rakotoniaina, Teacher, Hartford Public Schools
Emanuel Ramos Torres, 11th Grade Student, Windham High School
Damian Reardon, Principal, West Vine Street School Robert Reda, Teacher, Madison MS
Ellen Retelle, Business Manager, Integrated Day Charter School
Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent, New London Public Schools Erin Rooney, Teacher, Trumbull
Emily Rose, Educator, Danbury Christopher Rusaw, Educator, Plainfield
Heather Santos, Member, Thompson BOE Joanna Sargent Ellen Sassu, Mayor, Bristol
Darren Schwartz, Superintendent, Waterbury Public Schools Julian Shafer, Educator, Danbury
Hazel Sheridan, Student, Nathan Hale Arts Magnet School
Jahneel Small, Chief of Staff, Educators for Excellence
Melinda Smith, Superintendent, Thompson Public Schools
Jeffrey Sousa, Superintendent, New Hartford Public Schools
Alisha Stripling, Director of Finance Personnel, Stonington Public Schools

Christopher Sung, Social Studies Teacher, Hartford Public Schools Susan Swan
Caroline Tanbee Smith, Alder of Ward 9, Board of Alders
Cecil Tengtenga, Associate Director, CT AHEC Douglas Thompson, First Selectman, Burlington
Nathan Tinker, Member, Trumbull Board of Finance Joanne Tolles, Educator, Danbury
Stratford Town Council Charise Turner, New Haven Public Schools
Tony Violano, Educator, Danbury Dr. Kim Walker, Chair, Westbrook BOE
Tiffany Washington, Teacher, Hartford Public Schools Dr. Marissa White, Principal, Hartford PS
Iris White, Superintendent, Bristol Public Schools Patricia Widmayer, Educator, Danbury
Magi Winslow, First Selectman, Bridgeport Lori Woodruff, Educator, Danbury
Jill Zangerl Chairperson, Putnam BOE Paul Zulpa, First Selectman, Town of Woodbury
Danielle Melino, Teacher, Region 1 School Mrs. Kimberly Mills Feldman Franklin Mora
Payton Morgillo, Student, Lyman Hall High School CJ Parker, Hearing Youth Voices
Akil Peck, City Councilor, New London Eric Protulis, Executive Director, EASTCONN.
Jannine Ramirez-Gutierrez, MSW Student, SCSU Maggi Anstett
Jon Russo, Program Coordinator, Stamford Regional ASTE Programs
Elaine Adams, Chairwoman, New London Board of Education Claire Weitzman
Alex Knopp, Plaintiffs Representative, Sheff v. O'Neill Case
Sana Shah, Director of Policy & Advocacy, CT Project Action Fund
Ben Shaiken, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, CT Community Nonprofit Alliance
Elizabeth Horton Sheff, Plaintiff, Sheff v O'Neill Case
Ruchi Sheth, Research & Policy Associate, Connecticut Voices for Children
Joseph Sokolovic, Vice Chair, Bridgeport BOE Isabella Stegos, Student Student, Ledyard HS
Jennifer Thomas, Parent Stephanie Wanzer, President, CES Education Association

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Shawn Cry, President, CAPSEF

In this individual's testimony, the author expresses opposition to Section 8 in HB 5002. The primary concern with Section 8 of HB 5002 is that it would fundamentally change how "reasonable costs" are defined for private special education providers. By shifting from reimbursement based on actual costs to a standardized rate schedule, the author warns that the bill risks creating systemic underfunding. He emphasizes that private special education

schools serve students with the most complex and intensive needs, making their costs inherently non-negotiable. Disconnecting reimbursement from real expenses, they state, could destabilize these programs, reduce capacity, and ultimately jeopardize student placements. The author raises practical concerns about implementation timelines, noting that conflicting deadlines for rate-setting and contract submissions would create logistical challenges and make compliance unrealistic.

Lisa Gregory, CEO, Milestones Behavioral Services

Milestones Behavioral Services submits testimony opposing Section 8 of HB 5002 due to concerns about its impact on approved private special education providers. The author explains that Milestones serves over 100 students with autism and related disabilities who require intensive, individualized Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services. These students are typically placed in private programs because their needs cannot be met in district settings. The author's main concern is that Section 8 redefines "reasonable costs" based on a state rate schedule rather than actual costs incurred. This removes the link between reimbursement and the real cost of providing mandated services, which are driven by student needs, staffing requirements, and legal obligations. The author warns that if rates do not reflect true costs, providers may face structural underfunding, leading to financial instability, reduced program capacity, and fewer appropriate placement options for students with significant needs.

Gwen Killheffer, Executive Director of Education, Solterra Academy

Solterra Academy, a therapeutic day school and approved private special education provider, submits testimony opposing Section 8 of HB 5002. They argue that the provision, which redefines "reasonable costs" undermines the current funding structure for private special education programs. The author emphasizes that these schools serve students with the most intensive needs, where costs are driven by required staffing ratios, individualized education programs, safety requirements, and clinical supports (not discretionary spending). They warn that disconnecting reimbursement from real costs could lead to structural underfunding, financial instability for providers, and reduced capacity to serve students statewide, ultimately limiting placement options for districts.

Karen King, Director of Education, St Vincent Special Needs School

This testimony opposes Section 8 of HB 5002 and related provisions in HB 5325, while supporting HB 5329. The author explains that St. Vincent's serves students with significant developmental and medical needs requiring intensive instruction, therapy, and medical monitoring. As an approved private special education provider, she emphasizes that these programs serve students who cannot be supported in district settings. The primary concern is Section 8 of HB 5002, which redefines "reasonable costs" based on a state rate schedule rather than actual incurred costs. The testimony argues this change removes the link between reimbursement and real service costs. The author warns that this shift could lead to structural underfunding, financial instability for providers, and reduced capacity to serve high-need students, ultimately limiting placement options statewide. The testimony is cautionary and policy-focused, stressing that maintaining cost-based reimbursement is essential to ensuring stable, appropriate services for students with the most complex needs.

Alexandria Lazzari, Principal, Rushford Day School

The testimony opposes Section 8 of H.B. 5002, arguing that redefining "reasonable costs" based on state rate schedules instead of actual costs would lead to structural underfunding. Because these programs rely on intensive staffing and specialized services, the change could

create financial instability, reduce program capacity, and limit placement options for high-needs students. This testimony stresses that maintaining funding aligned with real costs is essential to preserving services.

Emily Thomson, CEO, Waterford Country School

Opposes section 8 of this bill.

Scott Wells, Director, Options Employ & Education Services

Opposes section 8 of this bill.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Elena Trueworthy, Interim Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood

This testimony from the Office of Early Childhood supports increased funding for early childhood and early intervention services, particularly through H.B. 5326 and portions of H.B. 5002. Regarding H.B. 5002, the author supports efforts to address “benefit cliffs” in early childhood programs but raises concerns about prioritizing specific groups for limited program slots. Instead, they recommend maintaining flexible policies that better coordinate access for all families. Overall, the testimony emphasizes strengthening early childhood systems through sustainable funding, workforce support, and coordinated services.

Reported by: ReAnna Jean Adams

Date: 4/20/2026