Testimony Regarding Student Assessments
Raised Bill H.B. No. 6623: An Act Concerning Student Assessments

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Education Committee
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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee

I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Raised Bill H.B. 6623 revises the law on state tests by modifying the definition of mastery examination for children in public schools and it also requires the Department of Education to study issues relating to standardized tests. **We support the commission of a study to determine the educational, administrative, and financial issues of current and future standardized testing and we propose several modifications to the bill such as reducing tests to every other year.**[1]

Connecticut Voices for Children supports the use of multiple criteria to evaluate children's development and well-being in school. Standardized tests can be one way of understanding children's development of basic academic skills. In addition to standardized tests, public schools should use a variety of qualitative and quantitative information to evaluate children's development and well-being. Such information might include, but is not limited to, assessments that ask children to demonstrate meaningful application of knowledge and skills, observation by skilled educators of instructional and support practices, and evidence of a positive culture and climate in schools.[2]

Connecticut Voices for Children supports the commission of an independent study to determine the educational, administrative, and financial impact of current and future standardized testing.[3] The state needs an independent analysis of the state's current and future testing system. In our report, *"Addition through Subtraction:Are Rising Test Scores in Connecticut School Districts Related to the Exclusion of Students with Disabilities?,"* we found that the results of the reading and math portions of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), but not writing, are distorted by exempting students with disabilities from taking the CMT. Instead, roughly one-third of students with disabilities in the state were given the modified assessment (MAS).[4] In short, the percentage of children who met or exceeded the proficient level on the CMT increased, in part, because fewer children with disabilities have taken the standard exams in math and reading.[5] These children are also disproportionately Black, Latino, and low-income.[6]

The evidence from our analysis suggests that the State's testing system and the way in which results are used need an independent review and modification. Indeed, the various test data presents conflicting information. For example, from 2007-2009, the increases on the local Connecticut Mastery Test have outpaced increases on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) that tests a representative sample of children rather than all children every year.[7] In other words, the CMT, which is a test used to also evaluate schools and educators, has shown greater improvements than the NAEP, which is a diagnostic test. Daniel Koretz, a testing expert at

Harvard University, explains that this discrepancy could mean a distortion of data from either test, test score inflation on the local test (CMT), or a change in which children are taking the tests.[8]

An independent study would help determine other unintended consequences of the state's testing system. In addition to the discrepancy between the changes on the CMT and NAEP, the State reports that number of curriculum hours in several subject areas has declined, while the number of hours for other subject areas has increased. Between the years 2002 and 2009, Connecticut's second graders have had on average fewer hours of instruction in computer education, health, language arts, and social studies and more hours in mathematics and foreign language.[9] In other words, there is evidence that the incentives and sanctions attached to the testing system *could be* forcing schools to narrow the curriculum to "core" subjects, such as mathematics and reading, at the expense of a broad curriculum that includes language arts, social studies, science, and the arts.

State spending on testing has increased substantially over the last decade, but the net cost of testing is still unclear. Because the number of children that were required to take standardized tests doubled, the amount of money spent to develop the tests more than doubled from $5.3 to $13.4 million from 2005 to 2006. The Governor's biennial budget estimates that the cost to "Development of Mastery Exams Grades 4, 6 & 8" will be $19,050,559 in FY 2013 and recommends spending of $20,148,978 for FY 2014 on test development.[10] Nevertheless, the available numbers do not include any assessment of the opportunity costs such as lost instructional time, administrative costs, or increased spending on test preparation products and services.

At present, the State Department of Education indicates that it does not know the fiscal and educational impact of the "common core state *(sic)* standards" on districts and the State.[11] Therefore, the study should also include an analysis of the costs of "common core."[12]

Finally, the definition of "mastery test" is vague and this definition *could* open the possibility for increased testing each year.[13] The revision to the law would keep the testing period in March or April. However, the law would change the definition to "mastery examination" from "examination" to "examination or examinations." This language *could* allow for multiple tests within one subject area per year, which would be an expansion of testing when compared to current practices.

We propose several modifications to H.B. 6623. First, the definition to "mastery test" should be limited to an *examination*, rather than *"examination or examinations."*

Second, changing the mastery test schedule could save millions of dollars. We estimate that millions of dollars could be saved, perhaps up to $10 million or half the current spending, in fiscal years 2014 and 2015 by changing the state's standardized testing schedule to only grades four (4), six (6), eight (8), and ten (10), rather than all grades three to eight and ten.[14] This funding could instead be used to increase the ECS grant, school based health centers, or other educational programs.[15] Connecticut used this every-other-year testing schedule between the years 2000 to 2005.

Thank you for your time and considering our testimony. Please contact me should you have any concerns or questions.

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[1] *See* Raise Bill H.B. 6623, Section 2, LCO No. 4249, January Session 2013. http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/TOB/H/2013HB-06623-R00-HB.htm. The bill states, "Sec. 2. (*Effective from passage*) The

Department of Education shall conduct a study of the use of standardized tests in public schools. Such study shall include, but not be limited to, (1) the fiscal, administrative and educational impacts of standardized tests, including the impacts on instructional time, curricula, professional flexibility, administrative time and focus, and school district budgets, and (2) a review of standardized tests currently implemented and proposed in the state. Not later than January 1, 2014, the department shall submit such study and any recommendations to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes."

[2]*See* Metric. Data Interaction for Connecticut Mastery Test, 4th Generation. "Connecticut Mastery Test Vertical Scales 2009 Interpretive Guide." 30 Dec. 2011.http://solutions1.emetric.net/cmtpublic/UI/Guides/VSInterpretativeGuide.pdf. The state department of education cautions against solely using vertical scales, or other CMT results, to make important educational decisions. The guide states, "Note: Vertical scale scores (like all other CMT scores) are based on the performance of individual students on the day of testing. When interpreting growth, care should be taken not to base important educationaldecisions solely on vertical scale results. CMT results can best be used in conjunction with classroom assessments and classroom work to identify potential strengths and needs of students in the content areas assessed."

[3]*See* Raise Bill H.B. 6623, Section 2, LCO No. 4249, January Session 2013.

[4]Cotto, Jr. Robert. "Addition through Subtraction: Are Rising test scores in Connecticut related to the exclusion of students with Disabilities?" Connecticut Voices for Children. New Haven, CT. Jan. 2012. Web. <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/edu12addthrusubtract.pdf>.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7]Cotto, Jr. Robert. "Addition through Subtraction: Are Rising test scores in Connecticut related to the exclusion of students with Disabilities?" Connecticut Voices for Children. New Haven, CT. Jan. 2012. Web. <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/edu12addthrusubtract.pdf>.

[8] *See* Koretz 2008, particularly Chapter 10: "Inflated Test Scores" for an overview.

[9]Connecticut State Department of Education. *Connecticut Education Data and Research (CEDaR) Data Tables.* "Hours of Instruction by Subject Area-Grade 2." CT Department of Education, 2011. Web. 1 Dec. 2011. <http://sdeportal.ct.gov/Cedar/WEB/ct_report/DTHome.aspx>.

[10]*See* Malloy, Governor Dannel P. "Connecticut FY 2014 – FY 2015 Biennium Governor's Budget Summary." Section B, Department of Education. http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2958&Q=518400&PM=1.

[11]*See*Connecticut State Department of Education. "Department of Education Legislative Proposal - 2013 Session: Changes to Assessment Statutes to Enable Smarter Balanced Assessments." 25 Jan. 2013. The proposal to change statute to allow the "Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests" based on the Common Core State (sic) Standards. The proposal background states, "The State's adoption of the Common Core State Standards necessitates a corresponding shift to a new assessment system. The Smarter Balanced assessments will be piloted in the 2013-14 school year, and implemented statewide in the 2014-15 school year. This legislation authorizes the state to require administration of these assessments." However, the state writes that the fiscal impact is "To be determined"; and about the municipal impact the state says, "Districts have considerable new responsibilities to modify curricula and train personnel in light of the shift to the Common Core. The CSDE is assisting districts with these tasks." Also *see* Rabe Thomas, Jacqueline and Pazniokas, Mark. "The repercussions of national education standards." *CT Mirror.* 5 Dec. 2012. http://ctmirror.com/story/18354/repercussion-national-education-standards.

[12] The Governor's recommended budget encourages any additional state funding be used for preparation for the "Common Core State Standards" and associated tests. It is particularly important to review the state's spending on testing because at this time the Department of Education does not know the financial impact of the battery of tests associated with the Common Core Standards. *See* Governor's Bill No. 6357, Sec. 3(h) and Sec. 4(c)-(d).

[13]*See* Raise Bill H.B. 6623, Section 1, LCO No. 4249, January Session 2013.Section 1 states, "Section 10-14n of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2013*):

[(a) (1) Each student enrolled in the fourth grade in any public school shall annually take a state-wide mastery examination. For purposes of this section, a state-wide mastery examination is defined as an examination which measures whether or not a student has mastered essential grade-level skills in reading, language arts and mathematics. The mastery examination shall be provided by and administered under the supervision of the State Board of Education.

(2)Each student enrolled in the sixth grade and each student enrolled in the eighth grade in any public school shall annually take a state-wide mastery examination. Such mastery examination shall be provided by and administered under the supervision of the State Board of Education.

(3)Annually each student enrolled in the tenth grade in any public school or any endowed or incorporated high school or academy approved by the State Board of Education pursuant to section 10-34 shall take a state-wide mastery examination. Such mastery examination shall be provided by and administered under the supervision of the State Board

of Education.
(b)Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, the state-wide mastery examinations pursuant to subsection (a) of this section shall be administered in March or April.
(c)Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) and (b) of this section, the state-wide mastery examinations pursuant to this section shall be administered as follows:
(1)Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, each student enrolled in grades three to eight, inclusive, and ten in any public school shall, annually, in March or April, take a state-wide mastery examination that measures the essential and grade-appropriate skills in reading, writing and mathematics; and
(2)Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, each student enrolled in grades five, eight and ten in any public school shall, annually, in March or April, take a state-wide mastery examination in science.**]**
(a) As used in this section, "mastery examination" means an examination or examinations, approved by the State Board of Education, that measures essential and grade-appropriate skills in reading, writing, mathematics and science.
(b) (1) For the school year commencing July 1, 2013, and each school year thereafter, each student enrolled in grades three to eight, inclusive, and grade ten or eleven in any public school shall, annually, in March or April, take a mastery examination in reading, writing and mathematics.
(2) For the school year commencing July 1, 2013, and each school year thereafter, each student enrolled in grades five, eight or ten in any public school shall, annually, in March or April, take a state-wide mastery examination in science.
[(d)**]**(c)Mastery examinations pursuant to subsection **[**(c)**]**(b) of this section shall be provided by and administered under the supervision of the State Board of Education.
[(e)Student**]**(d) The scores on each component of the **[**state-wide tenth grade**]** mastery examination for each tenth grade student may be included on the permanent record and transcript of each such student who takes such examination.**[**provided, for a**]** For each tenth grade student who meets or exceeds the state-wide mastery goal level on any component of the **[**state-wide tenth grade**]** mastery examination, a certification of having met or exceeded such goal level shall be made on the permanent record and the transcript of each such student and such student shall be issued a certificate of mastery for such component. Each tenth grade student who fails to meet the mastery goal level on each component of said mastery examination may annually take or retake each such component at its regular administration until such student scores at or above each such state-wide mastery goal level or such student graduates or reaches age twenty-one.
[(f)**]**(e)No **[**such**]** public school **[**or endowed or incorporated high school or academy**]** may require achievement of a satisfactory score on **[**the state-wide**]**a mastery examination, or any subsequent retest on a component of such examination as the sole criterion of promotion or graduation.
[(g)On and after July 1, 2003, mastery testing pursuant to this section shall be in conformance with the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110. The joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education shall, on or before February 1, 2004, evaluate the estimated additional cost to the state and its local and regional boards of education for compliance with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110, net of appropriated federal funds for such purpose, and the comparable amount of estimated federal funds to be received by the state and its local and regional boards of education pursuant to the No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110 and report its findings and recommendations, if any, pursuant to the provisions of section 11-4a.**]**
[(h)**]**(f) **[**Within available appropriations, the Commissioner of Education shall, not later than October 1, 2007,**]**Not later than October 1, 2013, the Commissioner of Education shall develop and implement a state-wide developmentally appropriate kindergarten assessment tool that measures a child's level of preparedness for kindergarten, but shall not be used as a measurement tool for program accountability pursuant to section 10-16s."
[14]*See* Malloy, Governor Dannel P. "Connecticut FY 2014 – FY 2015 Biennium Governor's Budget Summary." Section B, Department of Education. http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2958&Q=518400&PM=1. On page B-98, the Governor's budget estimates $19,050,559 for "Develop of Mastery Exams Grades 4, 6 & 8" in FY 2013 and lists $20,148,978 in "Current Services" for FY 2014. This line item would be reduced into a line item called "School Improvement" in 2014 according to the Governor's budget proposal. In order to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act, Connecticut began giving tests to all children in grades three through eight and ten. Because the number of children that were required to take standardized tests doubled, the amount of money spent to develop the tests more than doubled from $5.3 to $13.4 million from 2005 to 2006. We estimate a reduction of testing by roughly half the number of children could reduce the amount of money spent for the mastery test budget by half, or roughly $10 million dollars per year. The evidence demonstrates that changing the testing schedule could open up time and others resources available towards teaching and learning, while not losing important information produced by the CMT and CAPT such as the performance of subgroups.

[15] *See* Malloy 2012 "Connecticut FY 2014 – FY 2015 Biennium Governor's Budget Summary." Section B, Department of Education. The recommended budget proposes reductions to school transportation aid, school-based health centers; and proposes increase in ECS funding and various choice programs.