Testimony Regarding S.B. 175: An Act Concerning Recommendations of the State Department of Education and S.B. 177: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Declining Enrollment

Rachel Leventhal-Weiner, Ph.D.
Education Committee
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Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Rachel Leventhal-Weiner, and 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.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports Sections 5 and 10 of S.B. 175: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the State Department of Education and S.B. 177: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Declining Enrollment.

S.B. 175: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the State Department of Education

We applaud the State Department of Education for several of their recommendations outlined in this bill. Our research indicates that district-level resources, specifically the availability of small kindergarten classes and experienced teachers, are inequitably distributed, leading to qualitatively different experiences in schools across the state. In particular, districts with greater property wealth boast smaller kindergarten classes and retention of experienced teachers, while districts with less property wealth cannot.[1] We believe that several of the recommendations in Sections 5 and 10 ensure greater equity across districts, specifically:

> **Section 5:** The establishment of an interstate agreement allows districts to expand the pool of qualified teachers by clearing hurdles for educators coming from out of state to fill vacancies.[2] As of October 1, 410 vacant positions remained in districts across the state—almost half of these positions in our highest-need districts. The greatest need (20% of vacancies, or 89 positions) was for bilingual educators. The establishment of an interstate agreement may also aid in recruiting more minority teachers—an issue taken up by the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force. Recruiting and retaining the best teachers is an ongoing discussion for all districts and while establishing an interstate agreement eases some of the burden, the inequity in funding to pay these teachers remains a challenge.
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> **Section 10**: The extension of the Alliance district grant program will ensure that our highest-need districts have the funding necessary to continue improvement plans already in progress.

S.B. 177: An Act Establishing A Task Force to Study Declining Enrollment

We respectfully offer two considerations to the provisions of S.B. 177: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Declining Enrollment. First, while the SDE, in their report, "The Condition of

Education in Connecticut 2013-2014," indicates overall enrollment across the state has declined by 5.5% over the last ten years, we find that enrollment has increased in 16 districts, many of which are among the highest need districts.[3] Additionally, while overall statewide enrollment may be decreasing, enrollment of special populations, including students receiving free or reduced priced meals, English Language Learners, and Special Education students, is on the rise in many districts. We urge the Education Committee to charge this task force with investigating enrollment patterns within districts, as well as seeking information about the potential inequities in funding that must be overcome to ensure equitable educational opportunity.

I thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to answer questions now or in the future as they arise.

Respectfully,

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[1] Two-thirds of the schools with large kindergarten classes are concentrated in the ten towns with highest child poverty rates. These towns include: Ansonia, Bridgeport, Cornwall, Derby, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham. Two thirds of schools with least experienced teachers are concentrated in the towns with lowest proportion of white residents. These towns include: Bloomfield, Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Stamford, Waterbury and Windsor. See *Unequal Schools* available at http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/unequal-schools-connecticuts-racial-socioeconomic-and-geographic-disparities-kindergart

[2] See "Connecticut State Department of Education Data Bulletin: Public School Hiring Trends and Certification Subject Shortage Areas for 2015-2016" available at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/evalresearch/databulletinoct2015.pdf

[3] See Connecticut State Department of Education's "Condition of Education 2013-2014" available at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/board/boardmaterials040615/iii_c_receipt_of_the_report_on_the_condition_of_education_2013_14.pdf. See Appendix A for a list of the districts where enrollment is increasing over the last five years.

Appendix A: Districts Experiencing Increasing Enrollment (2011-2015)

District	Total students (2011-2012)	Total students (2014-2015)	Change in Enrollment
Union School District	73	80	10%
New London School District	2,961	3,200	8%
Woodbridge School District	737	796	8%
Preston School District	396	418	6%
New Haven School District	20,555	21,637	5%
Bridgeport School District	20,125	21,086	5%
Regional School District 09	1,007	1,049	4%
Danbury School District	10,488	10,912	4%
Waterbury School District	18,061	18,779	4%
East Granby School District	845	875	4%
Stamford School District	15,471	15,965	3%
Hartford School District	20,879	21,426	3%
Darien School District	4,806	4,895	2%
Norwalk School District	11,111	11,241	1%
New Canaan School District	4,148	4,195	1%
Regional School District 04	957	967	1%