

**Testimony to the Education Committee, March 4, 2026,
RE: Senate Bill 7 and House Bill 5002**

TO: Chairpersons McCrory and Leeper, Ranking Members Berthel and Zupkus, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Christopher Roche, and I am the Superintendent of the Woodstock Public Schools. Thank you for your service to the state of Connecticut and for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Connecticut must take decisive action to stabilize school district finances and ensure that Senate Bill 7 moves us toward a modern, adequate, and predictable funding system. I respectfully urge the legislature to do the following:

- **Fully and immediately accelerate Education Cost Sharing (ECS) to reflect current economic realities by adjusting the foundation for inflation to approximately \$16,500–\$17,000 per pupil, consistent with 2026 delivery costs.**
- **Add a 10% rural weight within ECS for districts serving fewer than 1,500 students, recognizing their higher per-pupil costs and lack of economies of scale.**
- **Fully fund the SEED Grant and the Excess Cost Grant and lower the reimbursement threshold so districts are not required to absorb catastrophic special education expenses before receiving state support.**
- **In Woodstock alone, full funding of the SEED Grant and the Excess Cost Grant would have generated an additional \$367,796, a material investment that would significantly strengthen our operating budget and reduce pressure on local taxpayers**

Connecticut's current structure places unsustainable pressure on municipalities. With 57 percent of school funding coming from local property taxes (and 74% in Woodstock), well above the national average of 36 percent, municipalities and homeowners carry a disproportionate burden while the state contributes far less than national norms. This dynamic is neither equitable nor sustainable.

Long-term, Connecticut must modernize its funding formula to make it front-loaded, predictable, and responsive to inflation rather than reliant on outdated assumptions or retroactive reimbursements. The current ECS formula lacks an automatic inflation mechanism and continues to fund special education retrospectively, creating deficits and volatility.

Other states, including Massachusetts, Minnesota, Vermont, and Washington have modernized their systems, adopted adequacy-based formulas, implemented prospective special education funding, and reduced reliance on local levies. Their reforms demonstrate that practical, forward-looking solutions exist, and Connecticut should incorporate their proven strategies rather than continuing to operate in isolation.

Too often, Connecticut relies on committees, studies, and working groups that produce incremental adjustments rather than structural reform. When advisory groups are composed solely of individuals whose experience is confined within our existing system, the outcomes inevitably replicate the status quo rather than move us toward a modern solution.

At this point, continuing to study a system that is not working rather than replacing it with one that does is a policy choice. Our students and taxpayers deserve a funding model grounded in today's realities, not outdated assumptions. I urge you to develop and adopt a modernized, adequacy-based ECS formula, implement prospective special education funding, and impose a moratorium on unfunded mandates.

Thank you for your time and for your continued service to our state, our communities, and our schools.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Superintendent, Woodstock Public Schools