



**Testimony of**

**Joslyn DeLancey**

**Darien Public Schools Educator**

**Before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Commission**

**HB 6187 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESTRUCTURING OF CERTAIN TAXES AND TAX EQUITY**

**SB 821 AN ACT CONCERNING THE REFORMATION OF CERTAIN TAXES AND TAX EQUITY**

**MARCH 15, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, Senator Martin, Representative Cheeseman, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Joslyn DeLancey, I live in Stamford, I'm a fifth grade teacher for Darien Public Schools and a member of the Recovery for All coalition and the Connecticut Education Association.

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

This year has been a painful struggle for so many Connecticut families and workers. The COVID pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated Connecticut's deep economic disparities and pushed many to the brink of desperation. The scale of this crisis demands a bold response—people are suffering, and our state has a responsibility to meet our needs.

Living in Stamford and teaching in Darien during this pandemic has truly highlighted some major inequities within our public schools. Since March of 2020, my students have had 1-1 devices, received live instruction while online and the majority of families had access to Wi-Fi and at-home supports while students were at home learning. Teachers had access to all of the online services and paid programs like IXL, FlipGrid, Brainpop, and online reading apps like Sora and Epic. We did not need to wait for these services to become available for free during the pandemic because our district had been paying for them long before.

On the return to school in the Fall, my district was able to secure 6ft of distance during lunch and 3ft of distance and plexiglass dividers for desks for both the "all-in" and hybrid models. We were able to secure smaller class sizes, the ventilation in our buildings was made safe, and our district spared no expense to get our students back in person as quickly as possible. Darien elementary students have been in school in person with every resource available to them since September 29th, (save for quarantines and a few days before and after holiday break to allow for travel safety and quarantine). Even when learning remotely, teachers were provided with cameras, Wi-Fi if necessary, and any tool needed to accommodate the various learning models. This situation was not the same for the teachers

and students in Stamford and other neighboring towns in Fairfield County. Having many friends teaching and with their own kids in public schools. in other towns. and cities across Fairfield county and Connecticut, I was constantly feeling so fortunate that I was able to feel safe in my classroom and supported with resources, because I work in a district that has the funds to spend.

These inequities have existed well beyond the pandemic, the pandemic simply magnified the gross disparity of wealth in Connecticut towns and how schools are supported and funded. Darien students are able to benefit from a school district that has funds to spend on ensuring they have every resource available. Buildings are kept in good condition, and when they are not, new buildings are built to replace a failing infrastructure. Teachers are paid fairly, professional development is widely available, and community support for schools and our extra-curricular activities is tremendous. As teachers and state leaders we need to start to level the playing field and ensure that all students in the State of Connecticut have access to the same resources as towns like Darien.

When I reviewed Gov. Lamont's proposed budget to freeze ECS funding levels and drastically cut state funding, replacing it with anticipated federal funds, I was dismayed. These freezes and cuts only add to the problem. We need to fully implement the new ECS formula by investing \$350 million. This is paramount to ensuring racial and class equity and would also alleviate unequal property tax burdens on disadvantaged communities. I see how well students do in a properly funded school system, and I want all of my colleagues and students across the state to receive the same benefits. By supporting HB 6187 and SB 821 we could fund universal pre-K for \$260 million and "baby bonds" for \$75 million to reduce structural racism. We also need to invest about \$200 million in our community college and state university system and in UConn to cover unprecedented budget deficits due to COVID. I know that these dollar amounts are not small, and for some, may be hard to swallow, but they allow for us to secure a strong system for our students across the state. Investing in our State's schools and children should be our top priority. In the long run, the benefits to these investments will far supersede any other decision made in this budget season.

Connecticut is one of the wealthiest states, yet it leads in income and wealth inequality. The unemployment rate is over 8% and 1 in 5 parents of children in Connecticut stated that their children do not have enough food to eat. Students coming to school hungry cannot learn well. Forty-One percent of Connecticut's adults are facing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Adults who are suffering from those symptoms will inevitably struggle in their classrooms or other places of work and should have access to proper treatment and healthcare services. I cannot stress enough how having the proper funds and plans in place to support a healthy budget that benefits ALL members of the state and not just the ultra-wealthy is the direction that we need to be heading in.

We have an unprecedented 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 robust economic recovery by restoring fairness to our tax code, 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.