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HB 6187 An Act Concerning the Restructuring of Certain Taxes and 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 Jeff Leake. I am a teacher in Cheshire Public Schools, a member of the Recovery For All coalition and President of the Connecticut Education Association. I am passionately testifying in support of HB 6187 and SB 821.

We all know the ever-increasing disparities the pandemic has exposed and the ever-present needs of too many of Connecticut's students and citizens. Just about one year ago, Keith Phaneuf wrote this in the CT Mirror:

“After hearing countless stories about how harshly Connecticut taxes its poor, state officials in 2013 committed to regularly conducting a fairness test. But after a report the following year showed Connecticut's poorest residents face four times the tax burden of its wealthiest, governors and legislators have repeatedly refused to look behind the curtain again.”

It's time to look behind that curtain once again, but in the meantime, we can and must do better than we're doing right now.

We know that Connecticut has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the country; only New York and the District of Columbia outrank us as measured by the most recent Gini coefficient comparisons.

- We know that the top 1% take home 27.3% of all the income in Connecticut.
- We know the share of all income held by CT's top 1% in recent years has approached or surpassed historical highs.
- And we also know that Connecticut's tax system on Connecticut households is regressive and leads to lack of opportunities for far too many of our students and families.

The degree to which this has increased over the past six years will surely be evident with an updated Tax Incidence Report and prove once again that our wealthiest Connecticut citizens simply do not pay their fair share. But our citizens and our public-school students cannot wait for

a fairness test – we must act now and invest more aggressively in both our young people and our greater communities, especially by investing in community schools, housing, and health care.

President Biden and one political party in Washington stepped up to provide relief for our students and our schools – almost \$1.5B to K-12 and higher ed schools in Connecticut– dollars that will help Connecticut provide students, educators, and families the desperately needed relief in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis. But will that money address the ongoing disparities that exist in our terribly un-equal state? Will it help us close the opportunity gap that has plagued us for so long? Will it provide the on-going commitment to community schools and the counselors and social workers so urgently needed in Connecticut’s under-resourced public schools?

The answer, of course, is no. That relief is designed to supplement and not supplant the resources we need. But Connecticut’s political leadership can step up and reimagine its revenue system and design a budget that provides what Connecticut citizens and students need. That relief, those resources, are what Connecticut must provide –with a fully-funded ECS formula, one that goes above and beyond the current formula. A funding system that ensures that the students in Danbury have the same resources--the same level of opportunity--as the students in Redding, right next door: Danbury, where per pupil spending is \$13,521, compared to Redding, which provides \$25,051 worth of resources to each of its students.

We need a revenue system that provides the resources and funding so that ALL of our students can succeed and become productive citizens in a state with a well-educated workforce. And because we live in one of the wealthiest states in the United States, we know that we will be able to properly fund a budget that addresses the needs that Connecticut has ignored for too long – housing, health care, and the various community supports that will elevate our state and lift children and families out of poverty and addressing the inequities that have systematically affected the most vulnerable students and communities of color.

The time is now. I urge your support for HB 6187 and SB 821. Thank you.