

Testimony of
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Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Appropriations Committee
SB 787 An Act Concerning the Constitutional Spending Cap and Exempt Expenditures

March 24, 2023

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Nuccio, Senator Berthel, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Kate Dias, and I am President of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents more than 40,000 active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across the state.

CEA supports the provision in SB 787 that essentially excludes funding to Alliance Districts from calculations of the state's funding cap. While the spending cap is well intentioned, it establishes artificial barriers to fully funding districts where student need is the greatest. As the needs of the state's student population intensify, school districts must reduce class sizes, attract and retain more teachers, hire professional staff to provide behavioral and mental health support, and provide additional critical resources. The state's spending cap should not stand in the way.

However, CEA believes that revisions to the spending cap should not incorporate a measure of student test scores. The only thing standardized tests reliably tell policymakers is what we already know – districts where students score higher on standardized tests are also districts where household incomes are higher. While test scores could serve as a proxy for family income and other correlated predictors of student need, the state's over-reliance on standardized mastery testing is already creating many unintended consequences. It negatively affects students' mental health and focuses school resources and classroom attention away from instruction that is most beneficial to students. Linking assessments to district funding would only invite other unintended consequences and misincentives.

Alternatively, CEA suggests that the legislature consider other indicators of student need, such as the density of the student population who identify as English learners or who qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch. There are also measures of town wealth and household income that correlate strongly with student need. Using standardized test scores in revisions to the spending cap is not recommended.

Thank you.