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Testimony of Donald E. Williams, Jr., Executive Director
Connecticut Education Association
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
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Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Donald Williams, executive director of the Connecticut Education Association.

Throughout our state, nearly half of all cities and towns are struggling to support the education of their children in the wake of \$67 million in cuts to our schools. This is having a corrosive effect on our schools in the middle of the school year.

The strategy of pitting suburban schools against urban or rural schools is destructive to the quality of schools everywhere. Our urban schools have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars as a result of unintentional cuts to the TEAM program that supports and helps retain new teachers. Rural and suburban towns have lost millions of ECS dollars. And, as you know, the towns that have been cut most severely are not the wealthy towns—they were not receiving much state aid to begin with—the towns hit hardest struggle to balance their budgets, have significant pockets of poverty, and serve diverse communities.

This is not what the legislature intended. The bi-partisan budget did not include these cuts. You have the power to restore the ECS funding, and I urge you to do so as quickly as possible. The alternative is to diminish the quality of education in our schools, and undermine local budgets for many towns all across the state.

As a means of restoring critical funding for our schools, please scrutinize unnecessary expansion of state spending. For example, the state pays for \$7.1 million in management fees for certain charter schools—fees that do not support the education of students. I want to note that fifteen charter schools do not pay huge management fees, so this is not a problem for the majority of charters—it is an unnecessary and unwise reward for the management of certain large charter chains. Those funds should be re-directed toward the schools that have been severely cut.

Last week, the State Board of Education heard from teachers, superintendents and members of boards of education and voted 7 to 1 against spending more dollars on the expansion of charter schools while so many traditional public schools suffer from budget cuts. We agree with the NAACP's call for a moratorium on new charters. There should be no appropriation for further expansion of charters until there is full transparency and accounting of their dollars, and until there is a rational plan for how these schools fit into the broader plan for quality, non-segregated education in Connecticut.

Finally, I would like to underscore how our traditional public schools are struggling to meet their important responsibilities. Last year, Hurricane Maria caused severe damage to Puerto Rico. Thankfully, thousands of Puerto Rican children in need were welcomed into Connecticut. Our traditional public schools have accommodated them without receiving any additional funding from the state. This has placed a financial strain on many schools, including some of our largest urban schools. This committee should ensure that all schools receive the funding they were promised in the bi-partisan budget. Thank you.