*Testimony of*

**Ray Rossomando**

**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*

**Planning and Development Committee**

*Re:*

**SB 419 An Act Limiting Property Tax Increases**

**HB 5056 An Act Facilitating the Expansion of Shared Municipal Services**

**HB 5472 An Act Concerning Municipal Finance and Audits**

March 13, 2024

Greetings to Senator Rahman, Representative Kavros DeGraw, and esteemed members of the Planning and Development Committee. I am Ray Rossomando, Director of Policy, Research, and Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA is the state’s largest association of certified public-school teachers, representing over 43,000 active and retired teachers from 160 school districts across Connecticut.

CEA testifies in opposition to SB 419 An Act Limiting Property Tax Increases, HB 5056 An Act Facilitating the Expansion of Shared Municipal Services, and HB 5472 An Act Concerning Municipal Finance and Audits.

**SB 419 An Act Limiting Property Tax Increases**

CEA testifies in opposition to SB 419, which effectively establishes a property tax cap on local property tax increases, by default, when property tax increases exceed a certain measure of inflation. Municipalities that exceed the cap would, alternatively, be required to hold a referendum.

While well intended, SB 419 usurps local decision-making authority and could result in the unnecessary politicization of school funding.  The likely result of this bill would be to prevent the level of funding a district’s superintendent and elected board of education members determined was necessary to meet student’s needs and to carry out the educational duties of the state.

Policies limiting local property tax revenue have failed already in many states. A limit passed in Massachusetts, resulted in schools and firehouses being shuttered, programs from libraries to varsity sports being cut or eliminated, and fees were instituted for classes like music.

California infamously imposed a limit, Proposition 13, that has decimated public schools and left a wake of unintended consequences. New York more recently imposed a cap that has resulted in schools being unable to keep up with the needs of the children in its schools, and local budgets incapable of responding to rising fixed costs of health care. Michigan’s experience illustrated the problems local revenue limits cause in times of recession, and their inability to respond to volatile changes in state funding for municipalities.

Policies that limit revenue growth become vulnerable to rising costs, inflation, and recessions. They result in inequities that discriminate against new, younger aspiring homeowners. And they tend to preserve “intergenerational wealth” at the expense of individuals and families just beginning to make ends meet.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Limiting local property tax revenue growth is an idea that has been tried over and over again and an idea that has failed communities across the country.

We strongly oppose this bill.

**HB 5056 AA Facilitating the Expansion of Shared Municipal Services**

CEA is opposed to HB 5046 as written, which does not provide adequate protections for collective bargaining and the rights of workers when shared service agreements are considered. We urge committee members to include language that is developed with input from and collaboration with the representatives of public workers who would be affected.

**HB 5472 AAC Municipal Finance and Audits**

CEA opposes HB 5472 for various reasons, primary of which is its weakening of the voice of unions in the work of the Municipal Accountability Review Board (MARB). Since its inception, MARB was designed to foster collaboration between labor and management. Seats on MARB are reserved for union representatives for this reason. We are concerned that this bill unfairly tips the scale away from collaboration, and in favor of management.

CEA is specifically concerned about provisions of this bill that empower public employers and the leadership of MARB to harm working conditions by failing to dutifully act on a negotiated contract. We are also concerned with provisions that further diminish the self-determination of municipalities at the behest of control by OPM.

We urge committee members to reject this bill.

1. https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/state-limits-on-property-taxes-hamstring-local-services-and-should-be [↑](#footnote-ref-1)