



July 10, 2017

Dear Legislator;

Educators stand opposed to any attempts to balance the state budget on the backs of students, teachers, or school support staff. That includes proposals to shift state costs for teacher retirement plans onto local communities or hike teachers' contributions to their pensions.

Together, the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and the American Federation of Teachers Connecticut (AFT CT) represent over 55,000 member educators who have already made major concessions and sacrifices. Recent polls show that the public supports teachers and schools and opposes any measures to diminish the state's obligation to them. More than 72 percent of voters oppose the state breaking its promise to educators and shifting costs to the towns. They also oppose state action—such as the cost shift—that will increase property taxes and/or result in cuts to school budgets. Voters know this will hurt students and schools; it is also unfair to teachers who have annually contributed their share to their own retirement.

The recent proposal to increase the percentage of teachers' retirement contributions by more than 30 percent (from 6% to 8%) is an unprecedented tax hike on teachers. Worse, it would represent lawmakers' failure to keep their promise to teachers, who have reliably contributed the majority of the costs—57% of the annual cost of the Teachers' Retirement Fund—to sustain the fund.

We recognize the challenges you face in balancing the state budget, but Connecticut's cities and towns are already financially strained, and teachers have made—and continue to make—sacrifices.

Our members have shouldered an increasing share of their health care costs. They have taken on high-deductible health insurance plans, often costing them hundreds and sometimes thousands in additional personal costs, to provide hundreds of millions of dollars in savings to cities and towns.

These concessions and ever-increasing health insurance premium costs paid for by teachers have saved:

- Hartford \$9.6 million
- Groton \$1.1 million
- Portland \$257,000

Additional savings realized by our members negotiating with their local school boards to join the state health plan include:

- Greenwich \$5 million
- Norwalk \$5 million
- Trumbull \$1.25 million

These are just a few of the communities that have benefitted from concessions from our members. But teachers' sacrifices don't end there; those who retire before they are 65 also pay virtually the full cost of their health insurance, up to \$800 per month, \$9,600 per year per person. Teachers who are Medicare-eligible and retire after 65 also pay a significant amount of their retiree health care costs, approximately \$7,000 for two-person coverage.

Our members also share the burden in the classroom and pay, on average, more than \$500 per year out of their own pocket for much-needed classroom supplies and resources, as well as costs for snacks for many of their students who come to school hungry.

Connecticut needs education and budgetary policies that attract people to teaching rather than discourage them from entering the profession. Enrollment in our state's university teacher preparation programs has declined by more than 30%, and schools are facing shortages in key subject areas.

Our students' future depends on reversing the alarming trend of punishing teachers and undermining supports for our schools. That is why, on behalf of our 55,000 member educators, we urge you to do what is right by creating a budget that works for all of us and invests in our public schools. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S".

Sheila Cohen  
CEA President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jan Hochadel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Jan Hochadel  
AFT Connecticut President