



**Testimony of
Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director
Common Cause in Connecticut**

Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee Informational Hearing

May 11, 2015

Senator Frantz, Representative Davis, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Cheri Quickmire and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizens' lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has worked for four decades in Connecticut and worked with the General Assembly and many Governors to pass strong freedom of information laws, election reforms that open up our electoral system to broader participation, campaign finance and disclosure reforms and common sense ethics reforms. We have more than 400,000 members nationwide, 35 state chapters and 7500 members and activists in Connecticut

I am here today to urge you and the entire General Assembly to stand firm in favor of a revenue package that does not shift what are state responsibilities to municipalities who can ill afford them and maintains critical human services in order to strengthen our democracy in Connecticut.

As you may know, Common Cause is not a service organization. We have long maintained that a secure, educated electorate makes the strongest democracy and we work to insure that as many people from all walks of life are able to participate. John W. Gardner, founder of Common Cause was a Republican who served in the Cabinet of President Lyndon Johnson started Common Cause *"for those Americans who want to help in the rebuilding of the nation"*. Rebuilding (or investing in) our nation and state is not possible for families and individuals who are struggling with basic needs. Families unsure about their next meal or their ability to pay rent or utilities, and who must make decisions about which bills to pay and which to put on hold are notable to participate in our democracy. This is unacceptable and weakens our democracy.

Voters overwhelmingly believe that Americans today aren't equal because the wealthy and special interests have more power. Voters want an equal say in the direction of our government and the protection of our rights. But voters believe that part of the problem in democracy is that voters' voices are drowned out by money and special interests. Or are simply ignored. We believe that inequity in the access to power relates to inequity in access to resources.

According to a report from the Economic Analysis and Research Network, Connecticut's top 1% of earners made an average of \$2.7 million last year, while the bottom 99% averaged \$52,000, a ratio of 51:1ⁱ. The current rate of childhood poverty in Connecticut is 15%, the 8th highest in the nation, while the total rate food insecurity is 13.4%.ⁱⁱ It is disgraceful that in the state with the highest earners in the nation should

have over 1 in 7 citizens go hungry. When families are struggling just to get food on the table, they simply do not have the capacity to fully participate in democracy or be civically engaged.

We appreciate that the Republican budget recognizes that there are unmet human needs in our state and public services that must be restored and retained. Proposed cuts unfairly target those least able to mitigate the damage. Spending on children and families makes up only a *third* of the budget, but over *half* of cuts proposed in the Governor's budget. **We suggest that now should be a time of investment. Shortsighted divestment will cost in the future, especially in the lives of our children.**

In order to avoid the harmful effect of these cuts, we have asked the Finance Revenue and Bonding committee to raise revenue. As we said in Public Hearing testimony we support the revenue ideas of groups like Connecticut Voices for Children, including a more progressive income tax, the elimination of certain tax breaks, and raising the cigarette tax, among others. In addition, we support the proposal that would ask large, profitable corporations to either pay their employees a decent wage or pay a fee to the state to help offset the costs to the state to cover their employees' health care, child care and other basic needs. The state does not need to subsidize highly profitable corporations to maintain their low wage work force to support their ever-expanding bottom line.

Every cut we make is a choice, and every time we neglect to address income inequality is a choice. We must make better choices. As John Gardner said, "*Nobody likes to pay taxes. But if this nation [state] is to solve its problems, the citizen is going to pay more, not less, in taxes. Faced with that painful reality, the citizen is going to demand that the tax system be equitable. It is not equitable today.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

- We can choose to end a 1997 tax break for Internet services (\$62.2 million), we can maintain health insurance coverage for low-income parents and pregnant women (\$49.3 million) and restore the EITC (\$11.0 million);
- We can choose to make our personal income tax more progressive (\$300 million), we can prevent significant cuts to K-12 and higher education (\$223.9 million), restore cuts to the Office of Early Childhood (\$11.3 million), and much more;
- We can choose to eliminate a 1993 tax break for amusement and recreation services (\$70.0 million), we can maintain state support for developmentally disabled children (\$20.0 million), the Department of Children and Families (\$15.7 million), youth mental health and addiction services (\$2.7 million) and more.

We are working to build our democracy. And we are here to insure a better future for our children.

Thank you for your time.

ⁱ <http://s3.epi.org/files/2014/IncreasinglyUnequalStatesofAmerica1917to2012.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org/map-detail.aspx?state=Connecticut>

ⁱⁱⁱ Gardner, John W., *In Common Cause*. New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1973.