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Testimony before the Education Committee

Emmanuel Adero, Policy Analyst, and Sheryl Horowitz, Chief Research and Evaluation Officer,
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Representative Fleishmann, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle, and members
of the Education Committee,

We are Emmanuel Adero and Sheryl Horowitz, Policy Analyst and Chief Research and Evaluation Officer
for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that
works to reduce poverty and promote economic success for children and families through program and
policy initiatives. We appreciate the opportunity to present our policy direction for this legislative
session and as we move towards the future.

We are here today to express our opposition to Senate Bill 359, An Act Prohibiting the Disaggregation
of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups in the PSIS. As Connecticut's KIDS COUNT organization, CAHS'
data-driven initiatives support the well-being of Connecticut's children and families, and provide data
and support to those directly serving populations in need. In our work, disaggregation is a means of
identifying disparities, understanding their root causes, and exploring and advocating for solutions. **The
more we can understand about trends across and within groups within these communities—
including the local and state student body—the better.**

There are two aspects of data implicit in the proposed legislation. One is the collection of data, and the
second is its analysis and presentation. The indices presented in the Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT Data
Books demonstrate the importance of collecting disaggregated data in Connecticut. For example, in
2017 Connecticut ranked sixth in the country for overall child well-being, which included ranking third
overall in child health, and fourth overall in education. However, when disaggregating the same
measures, we learn that while Connecticut ranked third for non-Hispanic White children's well-being, it
ranked only *twelfth* for Black children, and *twenty-second* for Hispanic children. The non-disaggregated
rank is so high not because all groups are doing well, but because there are more non-Hispanic White
children in Connecticut, and their outcomes have a greater effect on the overall scores. **In other words,
racial and ethnic disparities are all but invisible when statewide data is not disaggregated.**

For the well-being of ALL of Connecticut's students, disaggregation is an essential analytical tool,
whenever it is possible and meaningful to do so. Detailed, granular data collection and disaggregation

are of extreme value for understanding whether we are achieving our goals in education. **We agree that sub-group disaggregation should never be used to single out certain groups, but rather should be structured to inform about *all* sub-groups residing in CT who could benefit from an increased understanding of their needs.**

However, we believe that prohibiting PSIS disaggregation if such data is not collected for the entire student population of the Connecticut creates an unnecessary structural obstacle. The numerous private schools and districts, and homeschooled students—all of which by definition would not fall within the purview of the PSIS—may have their own distinct policies, and their relatively smaller and perhaps more homogenous populations may not allow for levels of disaggregation that are routine for students in the public school systems. **Therefore, we believe that the disaggregation of PSIS data should be uniform across all groups within *public* school districts.**

If we fail to collect data on our different populations, we have permanently lost the opportunity to understand and help the different ethnic groups who reside in our state. It is very true that asking for information about a person's background can sometimes be painful, and that some of the ways this data can seem insensitive. **However, the data itself is not the problem, and by refusing to collect this information, we may hide the very issues that have allowed discrimination and bias to persist.**

We also take issue with limiting our data collection to the level mandated by the Federal government. As we know, Connecticut's population and social and economic outcomes are not typical of much of the country, and we therefore should never assume that Federally-mandated conventions for disaggregation will always be sufficient for Connecticut's students.

It is customary for state and federal agencies to protect the quality and sanctity of disaggregated data. For data involving small populations (which would include most sub-group data in Connecticut), low counts or rates for groups with small sizes are routinely suppressed, due to both low statistical significance and privacy concerns. Those who curate data create and enforce guidelines and regulations to protect these data against misuse, and generally opt to withhold the raw numbers from public release. But, there is a clear difference between not publishing the data for statistical or privacy concerns, and not collecting the data at all.

Finally, racial and ethnic subgroup disaggregation is not without wider precedent. The U.S. Census breaks down the entire population in this fashion, from the national level all the way down to the block level. In fact, proposed changes in the 2020 Census include new sub-group disaggregations. The data collection and disaggregation in the Census is decided on and carried out only after thorough analysis of data quality and potential benefits to the included populations. Any potential subgroup disaggregation for *any* racial or ethnic group in Connecticut—in PSIS or any other state data—should also be done *only* after a similarly thorough level of analysis. But preemptively prohibiting this level of disaggregation, especially before we fully understand what the data could teach school and state administrators about the student population, will only compromise administrators' ability to be fully responsive to otherwise unforeseen trends in potential barriers to student success within Connecticut's diverse communities.