

Dear Finance Committee Members,

I hope this testimony does not arrive too late to be influential.

My name is Ben Revkin and I live and work in East Greenwich. My state rep is Justine Caldwell. I am writing in support of HB 5749, which would add categorical aid for our schools in EG that are struggling significantly with an \$800,000 gap in state funding this year.

As a teacher at the high school, I see firsthand what fluctuating state aid does to the municipal budget process. A large swing like the one this year means fewer teachers and programs. Even after several “back to the drawing board” moments between our school committee and superintendent, the “best” solution they could come up with is a reduction in some teachers and paraprofessionals, librarians, zero money for capital improvements, and reductions in professional development. As a district that is trying to expand and provide the best it can for the students and teachers, we can’t even maintain the status quo, let alone venture into new and better services for our community.

I believe we are in a unique situation. East Greenwich is often portrayed as a wealthy community that should be able to take care of itself, but it is also hamstrung by the same 4% max tax increase that all other communities are. Even if there were the political will to increase taxes beyond that percentage to help meet the budget shortfall, the max increase is not something easily overcome except through a difficult waiver process.

I have been to meetings of both my school committee and town council and am heartened by their promise to work on long term fixes to this situation. My own thought is having a mechanism in place to average out swings in the state aid formula so that no single community’s aid ever increases or decreases year over year by more than a manageable small percentage. In any event, until those solutions are figured out, I hope you can pass this bill to help our struggling town.

Sincerely,  
Ben Revkin