

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD (MARB)
MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date and Time: Thursday, December 18, 2025, 10:00 AM

Meeting Location: This was a virtual meeting. Meeting materials can be found at <https://portal.ct.gov/OPM/Marb/Full-Board-Meetings-and-Materials>

Call-In Instructions: Telephone: 1-860-840-2075
Meeting ID: 546 626 825#

Members in Attendance: Kimberly Kennison (Secretary Designee), Kevin Alvarez (State Treasurer’s Designee), David Biller, Stephen Falcigno, Thomas Hamilton, Lisa Hammersley, Sal Luciano, and Susan Weisselberg.

Municipal Officials in Attendance: Arunan Arulampalam (left at 10:18AM), Julian Freund, Leigh Ann Ralls, Dr. Andrae Townsel, Caitlin Richard, Kondra Rattley, and Jennifer Hoffman.

OPM Staff in Attendance: John Mehr, Simon Jiang, Bill Plummer, Michael Reis, and Lori McLoughlin.

OAG Staff in Attendance: James Caley, Assistant Attorney General

I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks

Kimberly Kennison called the regularly scheduled meeting to order at 10:03AM. Ms. Kennison reported that Secretary Jeffrey Beckham has stepped down as the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and will be nominated in February by Governor Lamont to serve as a Superior Court Judge. Congratulations and best wishes to Jeff from the members of the MARB.

Ms. Kennison stated that the Governor has nominated Joshua Wojcik to serve as the next OPM Secretary. He will be formally submitting Mr. Wojcik’s nomination to the General Assembly in February 2026 regular session. In the meantime, Mr. Wojcik is serving as the Acting Secretary of OPM. Mr. Wojcik is joining OPM from the Comptroller’s Office, where he served as Director of Health Policy and Benefits. Mr. Wojcik was unable to attend this MARB meeting due to a scheduling conflict with the Bond Commission meeting. Ms. Kennison chaired this meeting.

Mr. Alvarez congratulated former Secretary Beckham on his nomination to the Superior Court and congratulated Mr. Wojcik on his nomination to be Secretary of OPM.

II. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Approval of Minutes – May 15, 2025, Special Meeting

Ms. Weisselberg made a motion to approve May 15, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes with a second from Mr. Luciano. Motion carried.

IV. Hartford Subcommittee Update

The Hartford Subcommittee held a Special Meeting on Thursday, September 17, 2025. A summary of the meeting was provided in the agenda packet.

V. City of Hartford

a. Mayor’s Executive Summary

Mayor Arulampalam congratulated Secretary Beckham on his nomination to be a Superior Court judge and Joshua Wojcik on his nomination to be the Secretary of OPM. The Mayor announced that this past week the rating agency Standard and Poor’s (S+P) upgraded the City’s bond rating from BBB to A- rating with a stable outlook. S+P specifically attributed this to sustained improvement in the City’s financial position with higher reserves. At the Hartford Subcommittee meeting, the City was projecting an Unassigned Fund Balance of 7.5% of expenditure. In 2018, when the City first came under MARB oversight, fund balance was less than 1% of expenditures.

Mayor Arulampalam stated the City is looking to re-enter the bond market and has been meeting with the bond advisors to draft a timeline. The Contract for Financial Assistance requires that the City receive the approval from both the State Treasurer and Secretary of OPM for any bond issuance. The bond offering will address maintenance to the City roads and sidewalks, and upgrades to the municipal vehicles fleet that the MARB approved with the 2026 Budget and the 5-Year Plan last May.

The Mayor addressed the labor negotiations. In this past year, the City came to an agreement with Local 1716, Council 4 AFSCME and AFL-CIO with 437 full and part-time employees. Currently, the City is in arbitration with the Hartford Firefighters Association and in negotiations with Municipal Lawyers Association. In the first half of 2026, the City will begin negotiations with the Hartford Police Union. The Mayor is addressing some wage issues that the employees have faced over the last few years while the City has struggled to get its financial footing.

b. Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools Executive Summary

Superintendent Townsell stated that he started this job on August 4th, 2025, hitting the ground running. He has been to every school building multiple times, and has met with every union, every department, and the community multiple times. The Superintendent’s 100 Day Report about the information learned from these meetings is on the District’s website.

The Superintendent appreciated the many different audits that were performed prior to his arrival. There was the Bue Ribbon Commission with recommendations, the Public Works audit with recommendations, the special education audit that came with recommendations with regards to the organization, and the audit report on the Magnet Schools. He took the opportunity to thoroughly review these reports and the recommendations. The Superintendent mentioned receiving a report from the Connecticut Department of Education that commended the progress being made by Hartford Public Schools (HPS).

The Superintendent announced that the HPS signed a partnership with the Connecticut Literacy Model, Hill Literacy, to do coaching at all the schools and to do professional development for the teachers to support HPS pedagogy, reading and writing.

The Superintendent talked about the partnership HPS has with the Hartford Promise that if a student that lives in the City of Hartford, goes to a Hartford Public school, maintains a 3.0 grade point average and a 93% attendance rate, the student is guaranteed up to a \$100,000 scholarship.

The Superintendent discussed the 8,000 students that live in Hartford Public School area but choose not to go to a Hartford public school due to the loss of trust over the years. His goal is to earn back that trust.

The Superintendent is reviewing the finances to find savings. Over the past three fiscal years, HPS has cut \$19.0 million in 2024, \$40.0 million in 2025, and \$10.0 million in 2026. Also, it has eliminated 521 staff positions. There is little left to cut, and the District is now seeking other solutions, such as grants and philanthropic support.

c. Review and Discussion: Monthly Financial Reports – City and Board of Education – October 2025

Mr. Freund provided an overview of the City’s monthly financial report through October 2025. The City is projecting an overall deficit of \$3.86 million for this fiscal year. Revenues reached 51.0% of the annual budget, with property tax collections at 54.8% of budgeted levels—compared to 52.7% collected at this time last year. On the expenditure side, the City has spent 33.0% of its budget compared to 32.0% last year. The deficit of \$3.86 million is comprised of unfavorable payroll and overtime expenditures, not recognizing any vacancy savings, and unfavorable benefits costs. The additional revenue of \$8.0 million that the City is to receive from the State Grants in Aid program is not included in the projections. These funds are earmarked for Capital needs.

Ms. Richard presented the Board of Education’s (BOE) monthly financial report through October 2025. The BOE is projecting a year-end deficit of \$18.0 million. This being due to a decline in enrollment, causing a revenue loss of \$5 million, to the increase in the staffing fill rate that affected not realizing the vacancy savings resulting in a \$11 million loss, and to an increase of special education paraprofessionals allocation of \$2 million. She noted that a declining enrollment of 1,400 students is lower than last year. Revenue from the Magnet School operating grant that is based on the number of suburban students that enroll in Hartford Magnet Schools is down. The Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) Grant was fully funded this year. The staffing rate was budgeted at an assumed 6% vacancy rate this year. Currently, the vacancy rate is at 3% compared to a 13% vacancy rate last year for certified teachers, especially special education teachers. The new teacher contract that went into effect this year has significantly increased salaries. Special education students are entering the school system with Individual Education Plans (IEP) and mandated services are requiring additional 60 paraprofessionals.

Mr. Hamilton expressed concern with the \$18 million projected deficit and the direction it seems to be going this fiscal year. Ms. Richard said that the next step is getting better census data in January for true projections. With attrition, she mentioned reviewing the hiring process and a hiring freeze. Also, freezing of discretionary general fund expenses. Board members discussed special education, the lack of control on many forces that impact the BOE budget and City of Hartford median income.

d. Review and Discussion: City’s and Board of Education FY2025 5-Year Plans and Mitigation Plans

Mr. Freund stated there are no significant changes in the 5-Year Plan. The City continues to work on the bonding package and the lease purchase. In terms of mitigation, the City and the Board have been working with a consultant looking at two areas. The first is a review of potential consolidation

of school facilities. The second is shared services that include financial operations, human resources, medical billing, and a few other select areas.

Ms. Kennison asked Ms. Richards for any comments on the Board of Education 5-Year Plan. Ms. Richard requested to change the agenda order by moving up agenda item V-g, that will provide updates to the budget deficit projection and mitigation.

Mr. Biller made a motion to move up Agenda Item V – g: Presentation – Hartford Public Schools – FY 2026-2027 Budget Kickoff, seconded by Mr. Luciano. Motion carried.

V. g. Presentation – Hartford Public Schools – FY 2026-2027 Budget Kickoff

A copy of the Hartford Public Schools PowerPoint presentation on FY2026-2027 Budget Kickoff was provided to the MARB members in the agenda packet. Superintendent Dr. Townsell and Ms. Richard discussed the PowerPoint as it relates to FY2026 budget and the FY2027 budget development.

Ms. Richard said this presentation is an overall summary going into financial data and an update of the enrollment data. It presents the continual structural deficit of flat revenue and rising costs that exists in the Hartford Public School (HPS) system with a projected \$35 million deficit in year one and getting to \$90 million in five years. The driving costs are special education tuition and door-to-door transportation. Some of the Hartford students are either engaged in the Open Choice System attending non-Hartford Magnet Schools or are being placed out of district to a private special education facility. HPS is actively working on how to build more in-house programming that will be able to bring more students back to the District by creating better programs for students. Ms. Richard discussed various school options available to the HPS student population. In the past four years, about 7,400 students have left HPS with about 5,100 relocating outside of Hartford.

Ms. Hammersley expressed that the projected deficits moving forward are very alarming. The Hartford Public Schools are educating a high-needed population and at a prior MARB meeting a comment was made trying to understand the structural deficit and to come up with policy solutions to address it.

Ms. Richards reviewed the budget timeline that started in October with the data collection piece and identified trends that the data shows specifically for tuition and for transportation. A large part of this process is getting community feedback. Throughout the budgeting process, HPS is evaluating structural changes that would be beneficial to HPS. Also, to assist in aligning the budget to the strategic plan, the Legislative Advocacy Task Force was formed to look at the data for initiatives that would support making the HPS a place that students would choose to attend.

Ms. Richards discussed the FY2025-28 strategic priorities, the FY2027 budget priorities, the FY2026 budget priorities, and the FY2027 Community Engagement. The Board of Education votes on the FY2027 budget in April followed by the City Council voting on the budget in May.

V. e. Update – CT Department of Education Report on Hartford Schools Action to Address District Needs

In June of 2024, the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSDE) directed the Commissioner of Education to take necessary actions to ensure the stability of fiscal operations of the Hartford Public Schools (HPS). A consultant was hired to review the fiscal processes and procedures of HPS. In February of 2025, the consultant published their findings and recommendations. The CSDE in July of

2025, formed the HPS Accountability and Support Team to provide monitoring of and technical assistance to HPS relating to the consultant recommendations.

The CSDE December 2025 report on the HPS Action Address District Needs was included in the meeting packet. Superintendent Dr. Townsell read a few paragraphs from this report stating that the Hartford Public School has made significant progress in strengthening its fiscal and grants management processes and procedures with 14 of the 33 fiscal management recommendations and 4 of the 13 grant management recommendations being completed. The District continues to work with the Hartford Board of Education to review and to update relevant fiscal policies, to clarify roles in the Finance Department, and to continue to make progress towards improving its internal systems to monitor special education certified vacancies.

f. Status Updates:

i. City and Board of Education Labor Contracts

Mr. Freund noted that the City remains in arbitration with the Hartford Firefighters Association, with the goal of reaching a resolution without arbitration, and is also negotiating with the Municipal Lawyers Association, which consists of six members. There are two labor contracts expiring on June 30, 2026: the Hartford Police Union with over 400 members and the City of Hartford Professional Employees Association, SEIU Local 2001 CSEA, represents the planning and zoning staff, the zoning enforcement officers, the assessor's office technicians, and the school crossing guards. All other labor contracts are current.

Ms. Richards reported that all Board of Education labor contracts are current except for two that expired on June 30, 2025; the HFHP - Health Professionals Local 1018 and the AFSCME - Custodians, Trades Workers, and Food Service Staff, Local 566. Both are being actively negotiated. Four contracts are scheduled to expire in July 2026 with the goal being to begin negotiations prior to expiration. These bargaining groups include substitute teachers, child development associates (pre-K), education support staff, and building and grounds supervisors.

ii. City of Hartford FY2025 Financial Audit

Ms. Ralls reported that the draft of the FY2025 audit report has been received and the final review comments will be submitted today. The audit firm is conducting its internal review of the draft anticipating issuing the final FY2025 audit report by December 31, 2025.

iii. City of Hartford Issuing General Obligation Bonds and Leasing Equipment

Mr. Freund provided an update on the City issuance of the general obligation bonds and the leasing of various capital equipment. The initial timeline that was presented to City was rather ambitious, so the bond advisor was asked to revise it. They are also working with the bond advisor to prepare the bond resolution to go before the City Council.

VI. Other Business:

a. Review and Approve – MARB 2026 Meeting Schedule

A schedule of MARB meeting dates for 2026 was included in the packet. Ms. Kennison reported that four full MARB meetings are scheduled, with three to be held in person at the Legislative

Office Building (LOB) and one being a virtual meeting in December. She also noted that a virtual meeting of the Hartford Subcommittee is scheduled for April 30, 2026.

Mr. Biller made a motion to approve the 2026 MARB meeting schedule, seconded by Mr. Luciano. Motion carried.

VII. Adjourn

Mr. Luciano made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Biller. The motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at 11:45 AM.