



Penny Marzulli, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Prospect Schools
Testimony presented to the Appropriations Committee for the Connecticut State General Assembly on Thursday, February 13, 2020

My name is Penny Marzulli and I'm the Deputy CEO for Prospect Schools. I want to thank the Connecticut State Appropriations Committee for hearing my testimony today.

Five years ago, Prospect Schools was invited to Danbury to learn about the city and see if we could open a public charter school that would serve the community well. Community leaders invited us to Danbury because of our years of experience founding, growing and running successful schools — for years, our students have outpaced their district, city and state peers, and we have worked hard to close the achievement gap in our schools. We spent years getting to know Danbury, its people, and its needs, and submitted our charter application in August 2017.

Nearly a year and a half ago, the Connecticut State Board of Education approved Danbury Prospect Charter School's application with high marks, making our school one of only two to pass the rigorous process that year. The Board commended us, in particular, for the community's strong support for the school, and for spending considerable time building relationships in Danbury.

Today, thousands of Danbury residents support our school and want it to open — in the last year alone, our supporter base grew by 3,500 members!

And yet, despite that community support, Danbury Prospect has not received state funding. Despite Danbury's overwhelming need for more seats, despite the educational, social and economic benefits we could bring to the city, Danbury Prospect has not received state funding.

[pause]

Let me tell you a little bit about our school...

When you walk into Danbury Prospect, you will observe the power of diversity in action. You will see students from different backgrounds sitting side-by-side peers who don't look like them, learning under the guidance of a similarly diverse faculty body. We believe the bedrock of any successful school is strong, professional teachers. Our teachers will be highly



skilled in their content areas and able to meet the needs of a diverse array of learners. We think a school like ours is uniquely suited to serve Danbury, one of Connecticut's most diverse cities.

Building a school like Danbury Prospect won't be new for Prospect Schools. We have more than a decade of experience building and supporting successful schools in Brooklyn, NY, where we currently serve about 1,500 students and employ more than 300 educators and staff members. Close to half of our students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and no racial or ethnic majority exists within our student body. Over 50% of our employees identify as people of color and our teachers speak 19 different languages across our four schools.

Prospect students are well-rounded and curious learners. We know we will serve similarly curious and well-rounded learners in Danbury, and that our program will only add to the great school choices that currently exist in the community. We want to be a part of the solution to Danbury's current overcrowding issues.

The fact of the matter is, we are the only option currently on the table that can start relieving Danbury schools this fall. We believe that the state should allocate funds to Danbury which is the only large city in the state of Connecticut without a state-funded charter school. We believe all families deserve a choice when it comes to selecting their school. We believe they deserve it today. But right now, Danbury schools are so overcrowded that many students — and too often students of color — are being left behind. Too many Danbury families aren't being given the kind of choice they deserve to find a school that works best for their child.

I'm here today to make sure the focus remains on the people who matter most in this work: the students. It is time for our legislators to recognize that our school will only help their youngest constituents, children who are being left behind and underserved in overcrowded district schools. These children can't wait any longer. It is time to put students over politics, so Danbury Prospect can stop spending time advocating and start educating.

Thank you.