



TESTIMONY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING (K-12 EDUCATION FUNDING)
Jamilah Prince-Stewart, FaithActs for Education, 160 Fairfield Ave, Bridgeport, CT

February 13, 2020

Good evening, Chairwoman Walker and Chairwoman Osten, Ranking Members Formica and Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jamilah Prince-Stewart, and I am the Executive Director of FaithActs for Education in Bridgeport, where Representatives Rosario, Baker, Felipe, and Senator Bradley, all members of this committee, reside. Personally, I am a constituent of Rep. Porter who is also a member of this committee.

I am pleased to be joined by FaithActs' Founder and Senior Advisor, Pastor William McCollough.

We are people of faith building power to get out children the education they deserve. We build relationships, we build leaders, and we build power through community organizing and civic engagement.

In five short years, FaithActs has grown from a few pastors in a room praying for inspiration to a large and growing membership organization. Today, we represent 70 congregations in Bridgeport and beyond.

Our work has included demanding for stronger governance from our local Board of Education in Bridgeport, preventing busing cuts for 2,300 children, and securing millions of additional local and state dollars for education.

We want to use our few minutes today to make one simple point.

We have some serious concerns about the Governor's budget for this year, but we're not here to talk about numbers.

We're here to talk about justice. What justice means, and what justice demands.

Justice demands that every child – no matter where they live, where their family's from, how much money they have, how they talk, or what they wear – has the opportunity to attend a quality school, and to attend and finish college.

Justice demands that every child has the opportunity to grow up and care for their family, contribute to their community, pursue their dreams, and reach their God-given potential.

The talk in this building today is about a budget deficit.

But what we have more than that in our state is more serious. We have a justice deficit.

There is a justice deficit when black, brown, and low-income children don't receive the funding they deserve to attend a quality school.

There's a justice deficit when government rations hope by cutting programs that help our most vulnerable children develop into the successful people we know they can be.

There's a justice deficit when the state government perpetuates a world where choice and opportunity are made easily available to people with means, but taken away from people who cannot afford the "tuition" payments of higher housing costs and property taxes.

Specifically, the Governor's proposed education budget makes drastic cuts to the exact places where we need to invest more dollars:

- \$4,600,000 from state charter schools that predominantly serve low-income kids of color, are already underfunded, and should receive the same funding as traditional public schools
- \$1,600,000 from bilingual education programs that predominantly serve low-income kids of color
- \$530,000 from afterschool programs that predominantly serve low-income kids of color
- \$250,000 from Commissioner's Network schools that predominantly serve low-income kids of color

We come together in rooms like this and say we care about low-income kids of color. But these numbers tell a different story. A story of continued injustice that will make life harder for these kids.

Honored members of this committee: as you deliberate this year's policy decisions, we know you have to ask a lot of questions. How much will this cost? Will this advance my party's platform? Will this benefit my constituents? Will this help me get re-elected? Please don't forget to ask this question: **Will this close the justice deficit in our state?**